THE LAZY 2 KING

The Lazy King

Volume 2

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Chapter 1: Avaritia's Usurping

Part 1: It Reeks

'Twas but a simple unfounded rumor.
That in this vast Demon World, there existed but a single Demon Lord who reigned over the forces over ice and snow, a force that didn't exist among the original sins.
Not a single thing could stand before him, but without paying mind to the legions of Demons brought to their knees, he simply spent his perpetual existence on naught.
And of that supreme Demon Lord, the Demons whispered, and spoke of exaggerated tales.

… Of the Lazy King.

Seeing the young Demon nervously speaking on as if each work he spoke was true, I snorted.

"Ki ki ki, how pointless a story…"

A goblet dyed in a blood-like red.
I downed all of the viscous liquid within it in a single swig. It was a devilish wine made to bestow a drunken state onto the Demon Race, despite their high status abnormality resistance.
It was as if the liquid let off a fiery heat as it leisurely slipped down my throat.
That heat became power, as it expanded towards every nook and cranny of my body, my six arms and all.

"Still, Deije-san. I'm bein' dead serious here. You heard 'bout how the Dark Prison's earth was sealed in ice, right? In all actuality, that Superbia Demon Lord who climbed to rank one was supposedly rising in power to restrain it, or something…"

"That so… Ki ki ki my commanding officer's sure gotten high and mighty, has he…"

Of course, it's not like a deserter like me actually witnessed anything.
But from the current situation, I have a good hypothesis. I can calculate it out.

My Avaritia aches.

And as if to hold it back, I started downing the goblet that had been presented to me again.
A high rank Demon, for argument's sake, like me isn't going to get dead drunk from drinking something like this, and as long as I willed it, I could blow away the drunken stupor in an instant.
My eyes reflected in the well-polished wine were shining with desire.

Ki ki ki, this is why Greed's no good.

Something reeks. It reeks the hell of it. I've got a bad premonition stirring up even the depths of my soul.

It's the same atmosphere I felt before the war of black and white that broke out ten thousand years ago. It's flowing. The field's going to change before my eyes.

This must be that which can't be expressed in words, the intuition of a Demon who's

lived out his years.

It was the smell of treasure, and the smell of war.
The smell of death, and yet the smell of glory.

I offered a warning to my junior, a Demon who also governed Greed sitting beside me.

"Ki ki ki, well keep your shirt on, Zeta Adler. Don't mistake your enemy."

"Mistake… my enemy?"

"Yeah."

Generally, those of the Demon race are all self-serving.
Therefore, we're always surrounded by enemies. You can't even be negligent around allied troops. That's exactly why the ability to distinguish friend and foe is an indispensable skill. No matter how talented a Demon may be, they would be killed in an instant had they failed at that aspect.

Yesterday's enemy is today's friend. Yesterday's friend, today's enemy. It's important to see the sides switch as well. Those that can't do that, yet still persist to live long lives are either ridiculously talented, or perhaps blessed with good luck.

"Ki ki ki, exactly. Zeta, just how is that Lazy King related to us? Is he… our enemy?"

"… No, but…"

An instinct for strife sleeps within a Demon's base nature. It's a strong instinct. It's perhaps the second strangest force within us, next to our sin.
And that often dulls out decision making capability.

"Then there's no need to cower at him, is all. The Lazy King is… not our enemy. I would never be able to fulfill my Greed working at a place with hostility towards me. Am I wrong?"

"You're not… wrong."

Zeta nodded with an unsatisfied expression.
It's fine if he doesn't understand it yet. If he lives long enough, he'll figure it out eventually.
It's just that until he realizes that, it would be nice if my words remain in him if only by the slightest.

Even so…

"Lazy King… huh. Just what are you thinking, Boss Leigie… Ki ki ki, this is no good."

Leigie the Depraved.
Let alone General Class, he is a long lived Lord who existed back when I hadn't even become a Knight Class Demon.

The reason for his existence would be summarized into a single word. Nothing.
A steadfast Demon Lord who wouldn't take any action regardless of the times. An unchanging existence. Therefore, regardless of his high rank among the Demon Lords, there are few who know him, and those that have seen his figure are severely limited.

That's why I fear.
On top of his experience, he has to have something hidden on him.
Of all else, he's a Demon Lord. It would be stranger for him to have nothing.

Without having been told it by Zeta, I knew well enough of how Boss Leigie's land had frozen over.
It had spread around the expanse of the Demon World as a sort of urban legend.
More than a year's passed, but even if we still hear of it from those straining their voices in the corners of the bars, to us Demons who know of the insurmountable existences known as Demon Lords, it's absolute absurdity.

That's why even after just a year, everyone acted oblivious to it.
There's also the fact that a more precise threat showed itself, but that's not all.
It's terrifying. An unknown power. Of those that know, and those that don't, there are few to put the story to words.

Ignorants aren't to speak.
Those crafty enough to anticipate the outcome keep their mouths shut. Of course, I don't speak up about it either.

Apart from Sloth, a majority of Demons' Skills are undergoing extensive research. If a land of ice and snow were to reveal itself, then the probability of it being in the unresearched Acedia would be high, and seeing from the land on which it transpired, it isn't hard to imagine it was Boss Leigie that did it.

A large-scale Skill invoked by the idle lord… what sort of change has come about in his feelings, or what sort of circumstances erupted into it, I don't even want to know.

Perhaps Supreme Commander Heard stepped on the tiger's tail, or… oh, right, Heard was the Rank One Demon Lord now, was he?

Well, the thing I should be putting my mind to isn't some absurd urban legend or anything. There was a much more precise enemy before our eyes.

Contrasting his age, Zeta showed quite a bit of promise. Unlike me, he had desires that caused him to take up humanoid form. A young male Demon with ashen hair, and eyes of the same color.
Even without having reached General Class, in the few years since he'd been born, he was already in the upper ranking of Knight Class. His wit showed decent prospects.

An Avaritia's companion's got to be either another Avaritia, or an Invidia.
Even if we hold the same sin, our targets are different. There's some merit in association. Perhaps our affinity is even better than with Invidia.

"Well, rather than that, there's something we should be focusing on, right?"

"Yes… that's right. Deije-san."

Zeta sent a glance around, as if he was mindful of the surroundings.
A run-down bar. Without even any music, there were barely any other Demons present. In the first place, there are few Demons out there that actually drink.

All that was there was a strange bartender Demon offering us drink, and a pitiful lower class Demon sleeping flat on top of a table. Both of then are too low in power to

even consider comparing them to me.

Perhaps through fear, a sublime smile surfaced on Zeta's face.

"The『Angel』came out again."

"… How many times does that make it?"

"It's already the third time within the month. They're five of them in numbers. I've heard information they made an appearance at the Crimson Prison."

『Angel』

A Demon's natural enemy, and their predefined nemesis.
The vanguard of that white god's attempts to invade the Demon World.

Their power specialized to kill Demons was so great, that it's been said they were born for that very purpose.
Demons receive great power from the land of this Demon World, but they can put up an even fight even within this miasma. It's not like I've fallen too low to take down a low grade Angel, but that doesn't change how troublesome they are.

It's because my subordinates aren't as strong as me. They'll be purified by the most average of Angels.

The Crimson Prison was one of the lands managed by a Lord Subservient to the Great Demon King. That is something that should be common knowledge to those heavenly messengers.

"Casualty count?"

"Close to a hundred Knight Class and lower…"

"A hundred… is it…"

Doesn't look like the top brass took the time to come out.

But with only five coming out, I wasn't expecting them to. The top'll only show up when it's time for a complete war of annihilation.
That time ten thousand years ago was the same. At the start, it was low class Angels, then gradually intermediate level, and finally when high class ones were sent in, the King led a force of several thousands to combat them.

This generation's Demon Lord doesn't even know of that. No, she probably knows, but she didn't experience it.
Even I don't know about the Angels' situation, but perhaps it's something similar. A timespan of ten thousand years isn't something to make too light of.

To Greed, War is but a single turning point. Ki ki ki, it's something that brings up many a treasure chest.
With the low, and the intermediate, and the high, and even the Demon Lord Class Demons dying left and right, it all just starts flowing down.
Treasure of that level gets scattered all over the place. So our enemy isn't just the Angels. Precisely because of their desires, similar Greed Demons may become even greater opposition.

What I seek… the resources I desire are finite. If it enters my hand, it won't be goin' to anyone else. If others lay hands on it, it's not ending up in mine.

It's a game of looting. Of Angels, of Demons, or Treasure.

And the necessary power is something I possess.
Libell isn't here anymore, but in exchange, I have Zeta. Experience-wise, Libell came from the same time as me, but it's unavoidable.

The first thing we need is to discern the enemy.
The number of angels. Their power. Their goal. Their actions are always focused onto some greater goal or another by the will of God. Knowing that or not will change our chances of victory.

"What became of those five Angels…?"

"They fled, it seems. The moment they caught sight of the Demon Lord's main forces, they ran."

"How rare of an army of God to pull back… those guys are supposed to stick to their doctrine, even if it may result in death…"

Angels are perpetual lives created from souls. Their sense of life isn't all too different from ours, but there's a single law. As they could only move in accordance with their grand design, their powers were severely limited when compared to Demons.

And it's all so each and every one of those things can kill as many Demons as possible.

But this time's pattern clearly differed from the norm. How troublesome. They should've just lived facing forward.
What could they be thinking…?
Has a goal more important than Demon slaying come down to them…?

… Well so be it. Whatever the case, the result is predetermined.
I'm a Demon of Greed. Then there's but a single thing I have to do.

I don't think I even have to say it.

Part 2: The Meaning of Greed

A majority of the Demon World's open plains.
Besides one part of it, there are few ups and downs. Nothing but ruined soil expands in every direction.
With a Demon's eyesight, we can clearly see the emptiness leading to the horizon straight ahead, but among us, there are few who actually pay that fact any mind.

If you've got the free time to be pondering such things, go fulfill your cravings already. That is a Demon's reason for existence, and the measure of their worth.

But at the same time, I know of those that have reigned over these lands for too long, gazing out over the endlessly desolate landscape. Perhaps that's the standing that an

eternal life would lead one to.

The Demon World's lands are divided by the power they're basked in.
Meaning it was a result of the influence of a reigning lord over many years, and the Crimson Prison's land was once under the reigns of a powerful Demon Lord of Wrath. That Lord has long since been annihilated, and it was unified by one of the Pride Demon Lords allied with Kanon.

Rank Four.
Vanity the Egoist.
The land ruled by the great skin-headed Demon, Vanity Seidthroan.

He was a taciturn man, and despite his base Pride, he never bragged. He was also a pure-born soldier who brought others to their knees with his pure might.
While they were Pride all the same, compared to the two Lords Zebul devoured, he surpassed them greatly in strength, and service.

While we're all part of the same Great Demon King's army, rarely do I get a chance to see other Demon Lords.
I've only ever seen him from afar, but his large build that surpassed even mine, and his black muscles as if they were forged from steel… as Demons are beings of soul, outer appearance and power aren't proportionate, but unfortunately, from a glance, I could tell he clearly had the makings of a great ruler.

With but a glance, some part of me from within my soul fell into a sense of admiration, and he was a type I'd rarely had an opportunity to see in my years that surpass ten thousand. I don't know his real strength, but based on the air he carried, among the many Lords in service to the Great Demon King, he's likely at the forefront.

And in the first place, he was originally Demon Lord Rank Two.

If there are those that rise in rank, there are those that fall as well.
The fact that he dropped a place when Boss Leigie rose in rank was inevitable, due to Boss's achievements, but at the same time, there are some Demons questioning whether he simply lost out to the Boss.
Rank and strength aren't always coherent, but his strength was definitely within the top five of the Great Demon King's army.
With pride as his attribute, it's possible that if it just came down to strength, he surpassed some of those ranked higher than him.

If there was some merit in him putting a stop to his active service, he could rack up achievements whenever he wanted.
If he was to personally lead his army, he would lose freedom of movement. In exchange, he might pull up some unexpected treasure. Now is the time to observe. In that sense, me receding from Boss's army may have been an inevitable choice, but there' nothing I can say but that my luck was good.

The Great Demon King's army is the strongest force in this Demon World. Even if the entire world's yet to be fully unified, if Heaven were to choose a target to focus their attention on, then in would be none else but the Great Demon King Kanon Iralaude's head. That's something our side is also well aware.

The earth of the Crimson Prison was hot.

As if the Ira Demon Lord that ruled over it long past's anger was being manifested into it, the air temperature in that land was close to fifty times higher than in the other territories, and even if it wasn't enough to affect a Demon's livelihood, simply standing there would make one soaked in their own sweat.

While gazing up at the blazing blood-red sun, I simply waited.

In one of the towns of the Crimson Prison.
The burning town, 『Grey Rock』.

It was a small town nicely situated on the border of Vanity's Crimson Prison, and Heard Lauder's Dark Prison.
The number of civilians wasn't all too high, and at the same time, past aside, when both Prisons were taken under the Great Demon King's control, it lost all strategic value. A pitiful scrap of a town.
Back when the Dark Prison was under the reign of some opposing Demon Lord, there was a platoon stationed here, but the place's liveliness was not just something of a time long passed.

The reason I dropped by this forgotten town was to gather information pertaining to the Angel attack.

Even if I say that, when it comes to collecting intel, I'm pretty much a novice.

But that's not a problem. There ain't a single problem here.
I'm only capable of stealing, but among humans, and demons, and angels, there's that thing called 'the right person in the right place.'

The terrace of the dirty town's only café was horribly quiet. Me aside, there was only one other customer present. That lone customer, perhaps due to the heat, was prostrated over their table with a khaki hood over their head. That state only further revealed the desolate atmosphere of the land.

As I sat back into my chair, Zeta Adler came at me, jogging.
For a male Demon, Zeta boasted quite a diminutive build. Looking from afar, it would be hard to believe someone of his delicate features would be capable of battle, but if you underestimate him, you're in for a world of pain.
A Demon's shape represents their true nature, the reality of their cravings. Zeta's childish form was a shape made up in order for him to satisfy his desires. It was the form that best allowed Zeta Adler to sate his Greed.

But as a General Class, my heat resistance was quite higher than his.
This temperature must be putting him at his wit's end, as he panted heavily, and wiped his forehead with his forearm while he gave his report.

"Haa, haa, Deije-san. They gathered just as you said. Just as the rumors went, the platoon of Vanity's army that were annihilated did take a temporary stay in this town."

"… That so…"

It was the most recent report of an angel assault breaking out.
Their numbers were five. The casualties a hundred.
The target of their assault was Vanity's army. The attacked platoon was annihilated. Their numbers a hundred. It wasn't that high a statistic, nor was it low.

Precisely because of the high heat of the Crimson Prison's soil, there were very few settlements. Even if they numbered few, letting an army stay on standby required a considerable space to be prepared.
It wasn't as large as the Dark Prison, but the Crimson Prison was a vast wasteland. Even if a flying dragon was used, it wasn't so easy to cross it.

"For what reason did they gather here?"

"There wasn't really a reason made public, but… well, wasn't it just a restraint? Even if you say the army assembled here, Vanity the Egoist's army's supposed to number in the thousands… they didn't even send any General Classes here."

"Restraint… Ki ki ki, to keep Heard Lauder in check, is it?"

"He did cause quite a ruckus… the other Demon Lords are getting tense, I've heard…"

The Prideful Kaiser Heard Lauder crushed the armies of the higher ranked Demon Lords, and him becoming Rank One is still a fresh memory in my mind.
In the first place, Heard was an old Demon, and at the same as a General Class, his name was an influential one known to all.
Since he'd become a Demon Lord, his Pride made an alteration of rankings to be inevitable.

He crushed whoever opposed him head-on, and was one even feared by his allies.

The ones he had the worst affinity with were likely other Demons of Superbia.

The pecking order of pride is quite strict. That's even more the case among their brethren.
It's likely that Vanity never crossed blades with Heard directly.
There's his pride and all. It's natural for him to be vigilant… I guess.

Without any General class Demons, I don't think such small numbers would serve to restrain that Kaiser or anything, but…

Among the Demon Lords, Vanity was of the moderate faction.
He didn't frivolously advertise his Pride. That wasn't his personality.
That's why he had few chances to perform distinguished service, and Boss Leigie's rank surpassed his.

Ki ki ki, the important thing's to have skilled pieces to play.

"The battleground was also around this town. The army rose to oppose the angels that made a sudden entrance, and while both sides put up a good fight, the difference in power resulted in the Demons' annihilation. It seems there were some casualties among the civilians as well."

"… I see. Well, it's not that there's no precedent to Angels attacking Demon towns, but… the enemy numbered five, right? Five against one hundred… the gap must have been considerable."

Fights between Demons aren't battles of numbers.
It may have been clear when Zebul devoured my army, but quality was revered well over quantity.
The same can be said about battles between Angels. In that sense, a story of five

Angels taking down a hundred Demons- while their luck may have been bad- was quite possible.
They failed to contain the forces attacking the town, and perished… I think the death count would actually have been lower if the let the Angels do as they pleased.
From what I can see, the population here isn't high. While the Demon population was never as high as humans, even among our settlements, Grey Rock was a tiny one.

"Vanity noticed, and immediately sent out a larger force, but the opposition narrowly escaped."

"… Ki ki ki, so they were made a fool of. The Demon Lord must be quite pissed now."

"There's talk that he's prepared to send his entire army out at a moment's notice… well, since they don't know where the Angels ran off to, they can't dispatch outside the territory yet, but… there're intel his entire army's been gathered at his 『Palace of Noble Truth』."

The Palace of Noble Truth was the castle of Vanity Seidthroan.
Just as Boss Leigie's base is his Castle of Shadows, each Demon Lord has their own stronghold.
The fact that he assembled his army at his own palace means the possibility of him personally leading it next they go into battle Is high.
That's how serious he is. This is what it means to step on the beast's tail.

However, there's some part of Zeta's story that leaves a strange taste in my mouth.

"… Hit and run… when did the Angels become able to use such tactics…?"

Generally, God's personal holier-than-thou troops would never hold doubt in their own victory.
Therefore, they see no need in strategy. Those Angels were something like time bombs made of pillars of faith. Once they appeared, they would fight until all the Demons around them had perished, and until death, they wouldn't cease their struggles. No, that's how it should be.

"Ki ki ki, this really is a pain… has a competent leader decided to step forward?"

I don't think something on the level of a leader would be able to change an angel's movements, but…

Perhaps misunderstanding something, Zeta timidly asked.

"… Deije-san, could you be referring to the rumored Valkyrie who can kill Demon Lords?"

"No way. Even if she may be strong, I can't think that an Angel would abide the orders of a Valkyrie, who they think of as an inferior race."

Of course, I know of the noble revived heroic soul that killed a Demon Lord.
About three months ago, the topic of a single maiden swinging around her might became something like the talk of the town, and she was still an existence that made the Great Demon King's army tremble.
If you're looking at damages, she's a much fiercer one than this force that only killed a measly one hundred Demons.

But I'm thinking of this case as a separate matter. Killing a Lord… if there was one capable of doing something like that, there's no way the town would still be standing here like this.
While they both may be assassins from the heavens… that's all there is to it.

"Deije-san, is something the problem?"

"Ki ki ki, of course, we're going to be chasing the Angels. Zeta Adler, this is the critical moment."

There's no need to even think about it.
Right. This is the divide.
Only five of them have been spotted so far. So why not make them my stepping stones to glory?
Military service ain't bad, but just following a commander the whole time makes Jack a dull boy.
In the first place, the heavens've been too quiet as of late. While Angels have been spotted here and there, they've all been lone riders. A few Demons would die off now and again, but it's been a terribly long time since a whole platoon's been wiped off the face of the earth.

This is the signal flare, and there won't be a better opportunity than this instant.

History will speak.

It's because no one has yet to lay hands on it that『Usurping』ever holds meaning.

"Still… taking on a group able to kill a hundred Demons, even for you…"

"Ki ki ki, what's it to ya'? We have a trumpcard of our own. It'll work out one way or another, and if it looks like we'll lose, we've just got to run."

This is the Demon World. To the end, it's a world beneficial to us.
If we continue to pull back, we'll never be able to do anything. If I won't be able to get my hands on anything, then death's a better option.
Balance. Right, what's important is balance.

I looked over the town.
As its name suggested, the townscape that appeared to be constructed of gray stone was simple, but it maintained a form that made it unthinkable that Angels had launched an attack here.

"Zeta, we'll be staying in this town for a while."

"… Eh? There isn't anything here, you know?"

I'm well aware.
I began explaining to the lad, who let of streams of sweat as he directed his eyes at me.
It's definitely hot here. IT isn't a place I'd like to overstay my welcome, but there are times when a Demon's got to do what a Demon's got to do.

"Ki ki ki, we're going to discern the Angels' power. Perhaps there's something to learn from the traces left by their battle. It's not like there's no chance of them attacking this land again, either. Their end goal is the Great Demon King's neck without a doubt,

but we still don't know the reason for this time's assault here."

"… I see. But is there really a need for an Angel to have a reason to kill Demons?"

"No clue. But whatever the case, there's barely a trail to follow. Rather than setting off on a fool's errand, it'd be lucky if we found some clue."

As a General Class Demon, let me say it. If you don't use your legs, you won't get any treasure.

Usurping is a hunt. Pursue, and take. That is the meaning of greed. It's proof, it's validation.

Ki ki ki, why don't I teach it to you?

Part 3: … Should I Steal it?

This town is hot.
There's a shocking lack of any clues.
Those two truths are slowly burning up my thought process.
It's been a week since I started investigating Grey Rock, and with nothing being found, only the time had passed by.

The feeling of impatience. But still, there hasn't been anny information of those five angels being sighted in any other land.

Did they return to heaven?
The possibility exists. There's definitely the chance they were conducting brief recon.
In that case, that means we've been working for nothing.

I mean, the Rank Four Demon Lord is waiting on his throne with all preparations to take them down. No one normal would attack the same spot twice.
But Angels are nothing normal. The Iustitia they carry is just as sinful as the cravings carried by a Demon.

Today as well, there was only one other besides us in the café.
In my usual seat on the usual terrace, I wiped the sweat off my forehead, as I downed the lime-colored water in the tumbled glass in a single swig.

Before my eyes was Zeta, who was weaker than me, and thus more haggard.

"Ki ki ki, how interesting. For there to be absolutely nothing after all that…"

"It's as if there's not a single trace… it seems. Not even a speck of destruction…"

As expected of a former garrison.
It's not like it was put to much use, and the structure here are overly durable, with barrier magic stretching over everything without a single crack.
I did check out the plaza where the battle supposedly took place, but there were barely any traces of a fight having taken place.

With this, I can't even begin to imagine the Angels' attributes.

But it's not like our harvest was nil. I did figure something out.

"They can only use attacks to an extent not strong enough to break the barrier. As I thought, their abilities aren't all that high. If you include affinity into the calculations, they're Knight Class at best."

"And you're saying that just five Knights were able to take on a hundred Demons?"

Zeta's tone indicated he couldn't believe it as he looked to me with doubt.

"It's not an impossible talk. An Angel's power weakens a Demon's… well, fighting in the Demon World gives some enhancements, so in the end, it comes down to personal ability, but…"

Vanity himself aside, his army's nothing famous. So his troops simply being weak is also a possibility.
I mean, even if he may stand out himself, it's not like an army's competence is directly proportional to their Lord's strength.

Well, still, whatever the case, the truth is uncertain.
I asked around. I personally checked out the battle site.

… There's no helping it. There's no use in wasting any more time.

… Should I just steal it?

A feverish dizziness shook my emotions as if my brain were being fried.
I'm a bit reluctant to do anything too rough in the Egoist's territory, but… this world's survival of the fittest, after all.

"… Ki ki ki, Zeta. There's no helping it… do ya' remember the faces of the witnesses?"

"… Are you serious? We're within the territory of allied troops, you know…"

"Hey, if you put it like that, we won't be getting' anywhere. It's adaptation. Change to fit the situation. Also… right, Zeta?"

Spending a week investigating on this land is taking this young Demon's stress to its breaking point.
But in his current expression, I can barely see any fatigue.

I bent my lips into a smile, and pointed it out to my oblivious junior.

"… You're smiling at the idea, you know?"

"… Kufu… well, if you put it like that, I guess there really is no helping it. "

Putting it in a way that made it seem he didn't care either way, my faithful junior laughed.

While I say faithful, his faith lied not to me, but to his own desire, the cravings he harbored.
A trait that indicated a Demon of the highest caliber. It sure is fun, looking after guys with talent at the job…

Zeta leisurely stood, and his expression had lost all traces of tiredness.

His ashen eyes letting off a strong light were the only things shining under the crimson blazing sun.

Despite the fact that all he did was stand up, it seemed as if his slim figure had suddenly expanded for an instant.
A display of power. He let out a deep breath, gave off a repulsive feral expression, and in contrast to all of that, he began shispering in a calm voice.

"『Greed Hand』."

Avaritia Skills are based on a desire to take.
Looking back over others, and mocking, and shaming, and taking all of creation to your heart's desire. Its true nature lay in causing loss to others.

Ki ki ki.

Take it all.

The fact that there's something to be gained. The fact that someone has something to lose.
More oppressing than Invidia, more crafty than Gula.
Even though I have yet to become a Demon Lord, there's a reason I've been able to live over ten thousand years of life.

The strong do not foresee their losses.
They'll only notice after they've lost it.

The dreadfulness of Greed.

Zeta Adler, the Greed Demon arms let off a faint black luminescence.

An Avaritia Skill, 『Greed Hand』.

Its power wasn't on the level of the 『Wave of Starvation』 possessed by gluttony, but it was much more atrocious.
Ki ki ki, but it's all fine. It doesn't take lives of anything. It at least leaves those behind.

"Zeta, finish up quickly. Ki ki ki, Before we even meet the Angels, I'd hate it to have to go up against fellow Demons. That would be a bit much."

The sword Celeste I received from Boss Leigie was definitely a fiendish and unrivalled Demon Blade, but I'd still be at a disadvantage when the enemy's at Demon Lord Class. I don't think the Lord'll pop up after we just steal a bit, but I don't know Vanity's nature. It would be best to remain cautious.

"I… I know that."

Understanding that, Zeta nodded lightly, as he began searching for his target.
This town was narrow, and its population wasn't high, but as it was the middle of the day, the streets were being put to good use.

Despite the Angels coming out, they were quite calm.
Demons were the dominant race of the Demon World. We barely had any enemies.
That's why the lower one's class is as a Demon, the more they begin to take needless

pride in the powers they were born with.

Zeta approached a single passer-by, who seemed to simply be taking a leisurely stroll. Age-wise, he didn't seem much different from the boy. A Young Demon.
But He was much too lacking in vigilance. Form my long life spent mostly in military service, I could see it clearly. From his attire, his gestures and all else, he was too taken in by his peaceful surroundings I was even surprised he managed to survive this far in the constantly-warring Demon World.

Even when Zeta approached, he merely made a bit of a doubtful face, and he didn't seem to be putting up his guard at all. Perhaps it has something to do with Zeta's height being lower than his own. I mean, he looked delicate enough, that it didn't seem his hands could bring harm to other.
After the two of them were finally within arm's reach of one another, the young male Demon finally raised his voice.

"W-what are…!?"

"Kufu."

The young man's movements ceased. While his eyes were fixed on a point directly in front of him, it didn't look like anything was entering them.
Zeta's bone-thin fingertips were rested on his forehead. His casually extended arm put an ent to it all to quick.
The man's head wasn't pierced or anything. It was merely touched. It was done delicately, so not the slightest of wounds was left.

Zeta let his mouth curve into a complacent crescent smile as he withdrew his hands. It was a matter of several seconds.
Besides the ones directly involved, there weren't any witnesses. Or perhaps though people witnessed it, they pretend not to. It's survival of the fittest. The meaning of that should be clear.

Zeta's longing was memory.
Just as I desired, of all time and place, of all nature and creation, materials treasure, he was an Avaritia Demon who longed for others' experiences, and memories.
Inevitably, the nature of his Skills developed towards an ability to steal them.

I don't get what's so fun about any of that, but I doubt I'll ever be able to understand another's longings. Just do what you will.
If it affords me some merit, then all the more.

"… It's finished… kufu…"

His peculiar laugh seemed to be filled with good humor somewhere.
Perhaps it's because he stole something directly related to his objective.

The Skill『Greed Hand』.

It's merely a Skill that snatches up the target of one's desire.
In my case, it's loot, in his, experiences. It instils one's hands with malicious power to take from others, and among Avaritia Skills, it's known to be the one with the most frequent of use. And at the same time, based on one's wishes, it can become the strongest Skill of all.

Like how a General Class like me can only steal items, this Knight Class in front of me can do things much more malicious.

With his field of vision taken by ecstasy, he whispered to me with a drunken expression.
his eyes seemed directed ahead, yet he wasn't looking at anything.

"I see, so this is… an angel… my natural enemy."

"Ki ki ki, so you struck the jackpot on the first try? I doubt you even checked to see if he was a witness, did you."

"You're not wrong… but it worked out, so there isn't a problem."

Well yeah. For you, that is.
I'll allow it. I'll give you that much.
But in order for one to be able to continue pursuing their desires to eternity, there's a line that shouldn't be crossed.
I met his eyes, which appeared to gaze at some distant country, with a strong look of my own.

"You made sure to keep it to a minimum, right?"

"… Of course. Just as you taught me, Deije-san… he'll be able to move again soon enough."

And as if he had been waiting for those very words, the frozen youth began to stir.
With a bewitched expression, he looked over his surroundings for a while, but after a while, he started walking as before. His footsteps were firm, and I couldn't think of him as a recent victim of theft.

There wasn't a scrap of evidence left behind.
A question or two may pop up from an aberration in his memories of his daily life, but that's all. That's all the memory is. The longer you live, the less your life actually leaves a mark on your memories.

Perhaps even my memory's been stanched out before. Ki ki ki, it's a repulsing thought.

From his half-asleep state, Zeta slowly returned to reality. Like that, he lowered himself into his seat again, and began his report.

"I was able to take them up quite easily, but… it doesn't appear there's any new information to be found."

"… I see."

I didn't think he would be able to get anything new on the first try anyways.
In the first place, we spent an entire week here with no results. Otherwise, we wouldn't think it such a fortune to actually find something out.

Life is average. If there are rises, there are also falls, but it levels out.

"It appears what we've collected so far is true, at lease. Five angels, yes, there were definitely five angels donning heavenly wings here. Their means of entrance was the

sky. They attacked the town, were intercepted by Vanity's troops stationed here, and the rest is history. That's the extent of what the master of these memories saw."

"… I see. So, where did these all-important Angels head off to next?"

"Who can say… It's clear they made an escape through the sky, but he didn't see the direction…"

It just isn't going to go our way.
Well, I guess just confirming our information had some merit in itself.

Ki ki ki, I mean, that was just the first try.
Also, seeing is believing, and at the information gathering stage, the worth of obtaining the memories of those that actually witnessed it is unfathomable.

"What were the Angels' means of attack?"

On my query, Zeta started to blink.
He tilted his head for a while, before slowly letting the words flow out. Usurping memories and making them his own meant that he was pursuing the experience itself.
His tone was filled with fear, as if he was talking about a disaster that transpired before his own eyes.

"Light… right, pillars of light. A few meters in diameter, giant pillars of light from the sky… the town burned, and the Demons were mowed down."

"An Angel's Iustitia Skill… I guess. Yes, I'm sure there was something like that."

Just as Demons possessed Seven attributes, Angels also had a few classifications.

Iustitia was of those.

Anyways, I'm sure it was an attribute that specialized in offense.
I caught a glimpse of it ten thousand years ago, as a wave of their light cleared away the darkness of the Demon World, said to be unsurmountable.

A large-scale Angel attack… Having only Knight Class and below, Vanity's army was at a great disadvantage there.
Rather than the platoon being weak, perhaps they were simply unlucky…?

"… How many wings on them?"

"… Eh?"

"The wings, you know. Wings. They're the symbol of an Angel. You can determine an Angel's power by their number of wings."

To those that have ever tried to oppose the heavens, it's something like common sense.
And their wings were those guys' pride, so they never try to hide them.

"… I see. Then it's one. No, perhaps I should say one pair."

So only a single pair of wings.

They're that great a force. Perhaps from low to intermediate level. If I were to equate them to a Demon's ranking system, there's a high probability they're at Zeta's level, or below. Well, Demons have a naturally bad affinity with Angels, so Zeta alone would have it rough…

With Celeste, they'd be easy prey. No, even without it, I think I'd make it through.
Even if they burned the place with pillars of light, there wasn't a single sign of it in town.
In the end, their output isn't enough to breach the barrier…

Next, there's the possibility they have a larger force in wait…

But nothing's going to come of thinking about it that far.
There's no such thing as a safe battle. I'll at least drink down the basic risks.

Of all else, even if they sent down an Angel or two, there's still that monster Valkyrie roaming around.
This must be the turning point of the era. Thinking of the future, it's not a bad thing to build up some anti-Angel fighting experience here.

Perhaps still looking over his gained memories, Zeta still had an absentminded expression as his eyes traced thin air. I issued some orders.

"Oy, Zeta. It's time for some usurping. For now, we need a stronger trail. Since we're already at it, why not just take all the memories you can?"

Part 4: A Disadvantageous Gamble

"It's no good… It's not coming out at all."

Zeta had a fatigued expression as he retracted his fingers.
Before him, a female Demon around Media's age stood in silence with an expressionless expression plastered on her face.
The sight of Demons with these frozen doll-like expressions is something I've already gotten used to.

In Grey Rock with few pedestrians as it is, a back alley a left turn of of the main road. Even in the middle of the day, it was dark, and let alone Demons, there wasn't a single mouse here.

Even if we're in the Rank Four Vanity's territory, were at the outskirts of the outskirts. I mean, it's quiet here, so it isn't hard to aim for the gaps.
Zeta had already taken the memories of nine Demons.

A Demon's Skills were their craving themselves.
But it's not like they could be used endlessly. With this high heat and humidity, the area was incredibly discomforting, and the task at hand, that was akin to grasping at fog put a deep strain on his psyche.

Slowly, a scarlet light circled around his grey hair.

"… How 'bout it?"

"Taking the memories was exceedingly easy, but… once again, she's no good. She didn't see it… no, she witnessed the event, but didn't see anything past that."

It's a line I've heard eight times before.
I thought we were in luck when the first Demon we stopped had seen the Angels, but that was far off.
The Angels gave an overly flashy show of power. Each and every one of the nine we stole from so far had clearly seen their form.
But their objective, and the direction they set off in remained foreign.

All of the Angels were clad in a uniform gaudy glow. It's a light with that dreaded power of god at its core.
And that's good and all in the sense that it draws peoples' eyes, but at the same time, it was a hated light, and no one willingly wanted to see them off.

No helping it. The enemies were envoys that personally crushed the army of the ruling Lord. It's not strange for the civilians to want to run away.
It isn't strange… but…

It's ominous. It's much too ominous.
My experience was going off like a fire alarm. It was much too quiet. There was much too much nothingness.
It was much too perfect.
Originally, the appearance of the Angels, in itself would be suspected as a ruse, but we could use Zeta's power.
Memories tell no lies.

"… Oy, Zeta. Do you know whose report it was that said the Angels had come forth?"

"… Yes, it was the Order of Black member accompanying Vanity… the inspector's regular report. I mean, the appearance of Angels is a serious matter… I heard they participated in the force Vanity sent out to pursue, or something."

The Order of Black.
The Great Demon King's personal vanguard, and her direct servants.
If it were for Kanon Iralaude's sake, they would even turn against a Demon Lord. They were the King's arms and legs, as well as her eyes and ears.
That girl Lize was the same, but the loyalty that order shows to the Great Demon King was the real deal. Since this member was charged with a Lord governing Pride, their loyalty must be first-class. I doubt that order'd ever make a serious mistake in dispatching personnel.

If possible, I'd like to take that inspector's memory to confirm it, but I doubt that's happening.
As an inspector, there's no doubt they're a General Class surpassing Zeta already. Unlike with material wealth, usurping memories depended on the individuals' will, and mental resistance could drop its success rate. The low class Demons we stole from today aside, a General Class it too heavy a burden for the lad.

The one most anxious about the current situation must be Zeta.
When he's personally taking in the sights, there's not a single hint to be found. It's as if he's forced to open up an empty treasure chest over and over again.

As a young Demon, he's lacking in experience. The situation where his instincts made

him feel nothing but an indescript anxiety was probably the same as the feelings I harbored ten thousand years ago.

Ki ki ki, that's right.
Then I'll take up the place of the one who looked over me back them.

"… Zeta, calm yourself. This result is definitely beyond our expectations, but it's in no ways an impossible occurrence. It's not like we haven't gained anything. At the very least… it all reeks, is what we've learned."

"… I see…"

First, you've got to calm down. Regain a level thought process.
Demons are doomed to overestimate their own abilities. That's why when an accident occurs, they often try to resolve it with brute force.
First, take some deep breaths. Breath, and focus. That is the strong point of Demons that possess not only strength, but also intelligence.

Think with your own head. That will often change your fate.

/there are times when you've got to take risks, and risk your life as well, but at the very least, now isn't that time.

"Those Angels, they must have a smart one amongst them… no, even so, their numbers are much too small, and we still haven't a clue on why they attacked this town. Why did they aim for such a remote region… what is their goal?"

Simply slaying Demons?
A hundred Demons. With their military service, their power was higher than standard Demons. I guess it's enough or a reason for Angels to attack.
But that's exactly why I don't get it. Why did only five come?

Even if we may be enemies the Angels specialize in killing, this is a land that greatly raises our abilities.
Luckily for them, there wasn't a General Class among the forces, so they could easily take on a hundred, but if one was there, then five would definitely be at a disadvantage…
If it was the same heaven as before, if it was the usual angels that would resolve themselves to kill the moment they met a Demon, then it would make a slight bit of sense, but this time's folks… they retreated.

It's mismatched. It's all over the place.
The recklessness they carried to take on twenty times their numbers, and the wisdom they held when they retreated the moment the army came into sight. That gap births a sense of discomfort.
It doesn't match the angels I've seen up to now.

Sensing my hesitation, Zeta offered a proposal.

"… As I thought, should we steal a little more?"

"… Can you?"

"Yeah… Kufu, my Greed is… not satisfied yet, you know…"

With a face that looked quite forced, Zeta smiled.
Abuse of usurping. The fatigue he's been building up, and his physical enervation. I can see them all.

But this time alone, I can't go about babying him.
We need to find our trail before someone catches onto the inconsistency in their memories, and leave the town.
Time isn't on our side. We don't know when or where an Angel'll pop up again. We should finish up quickly as best we can.

But at the same time, I had a hunch.
That we wouldn't find a single thing more from this town's residents.

I returned once more to the soul-less café terrace. When someone of large stature like me is around, the targets tend to be wary.
My role was that of a thinker.

There's no doubt there's some cause and effect going on in this land. That Valkyrie aside, this is the only place that's incurred large damage from the Angels as of late.
After retiring from Boss Leigie's army, I've been around, but that's the only real change I've heard about.

"… As I thought, it's really no good… Hah. It feels like I'm opening empty chest after empty chest."

After executing another usurpation, Zeta let out a deep sigh of lament.
Oddly enough, his words were exactly the example thought of previously.

As if it had become a mere routine, I confirmed it with him.

"That was the tenth, right?"

And just like me, he gave a form answer.

"Yes… Those that saw it have slight differences, but those past nine were pretty much the… same…?"

In an instant, Zeta's face trembled.
He turned pale, and his mouth opened and closed silently as he sought out the words. It definitely wasn't a normal expression.
I instinctively rose, and met his eyes.

They were pointed at the air, and tracing the low sky that hung over the Demon World.
My thoughts changed. From a looped circuit, to a straight path.

"Deije… sa… tha…"

"… Oy, oy, is this for real… What trickery is this?"

There was a figure.
The form of a person emitting brilliant white radiance in the crimson sky. The large single pair of wings sprouting from his back were pure white.
Loved by God, and produced by him. The opposite side of the spectrum of Spirits from Demons.

『Angel』

In an instant, he expanded his power.
The complete opposite of the miasma Demons clad themselves in, an aura that could even be called holy was deployed across the ground.
My body trembled. My genetic memory, the emotions of fear carved into a Demon's soul upon looking up at their executioners.

No matter how I looked at it, the Angel wasn't even a hundred meters away.

This is strange. Why haven't I noticed him when he's come this close?
Angels are Demons' arch nemesis. Their specific positioning is one thing, but if they approach, I should be able to realize it at once…

I restarted my frozen mind with willpower. Fine. What I have to think of right now isn't something like that.
I slapped Zeta on the back to unfreeze him.

I laughed out loud.
I sneer. A maliciousness great enough to blow away this holy feeling.

"Ki ki ki, just when I thought there wasn't a trail to be found, the man shows up personally… I'm in luck."

Luckily, besides me and Zeta, there wasn't anyone else around. The town was frighteningly silent. There's plenty of space. I can fight with all my might.
I swiftly counted the figures decorating the sky.

"Ten… is it? They're friggin' multiplying."

Each one's individual power was, as expected, nothing too serious. Even including their affinity, they were much weaker than I. If I kept down this instinctual feeling of dread in my soul, they're opponents I could wipe the floor with in ten minutes.

I firmly plant my feet on the ground, and build up power. So I can react no matter when or how they try to come, I optimize my soul.
The flock of Angels was ominously quiet, as they looked down on us. What floated in their eyes was pure and utter scorn. The eyes of those looking upon an inferior species.
Ki ki ki, I'm being made light of.

Is this their main force?
No, that's probably not the case. This is them testing the waters.
The fact that ten came out after five is proof of that. Are they measuring the power of Demons?

Well, come out in as many dozens as you will. Greed has its own way of doing these things.

Zeta's made himself more than useful enough.

Mental and physical labor.
Investigations and battle.

From here on, it's my role.

"Deije… san."

"Ki ki ki, fall back."

『Big Pocket』

I open up the subspace warehouse of Greed.
Because of that unpleasant Lord of Greed I fought a year ago, it's mostly empty. But a splendid article's been left hanging.

It was a blade of fire said to have burned a fire dragon whose power rivalled Demon Lords to death.
I easily pull out the sword I had become accustomed to. As always, its crimson steel let off an explosive amount of magic, matching the sun blazing above it.

Demon Blade Celeste.

Once upon a time, it was a supreme treasure bestowed upon a certain Lazy King.
While me being the polar opposite of God, sensing me give off similar waves, the doll-like Angels' expressions warped cruelly.

"Ki ki ki, don't worry too much about it. I'm Avaritia. I won't go as far as to take your lives."

If you obtain one, you'll wish for ten. Once you know ten, you'll lust for a hundred.

I can't be satisfied with just ten measly angels. Bring on a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand.
You guys ain't the target of my desire, but I'll sip you up all the same.

I lightly waved Celeste. The magic that overflowed from the edge took on the the shape of a flaming dragon, that shot out to pierce the wing of one of them.
And as that happened, the Angell's body was covered in fire. He did a tail spin as he fell to the ground.

A thunderous roar.

The Angel's large build collided, and the café's roof let off quite a racket before caving in.
Wrapped in flames of legend, and Angel didn't move at all, and I didn't feel any more power from him.

I licked my lips. Just as I thought.
… Just one hit, it seems. They really aren't anything special.

Below Knight Class even. Even if I didn't pull Celeste, they're at a level I could handle.
I directed the blade at the remaining flock. As if pierced by the thrust I gave in the air, the Angels swayed in the hollow air.

Should I hold back?
At the very least, I've got to leave one alive, or we won't be able to take their memories.
But do I have enough leisure to accomplish something like that?
Can I render them powerless without killing them? The positional advantage lies with

the Angels ruling over the sky.
Celeste's output is too high. I'll end up killing them.
Should I leap, and hit them to the ground? Can I do it? Avoid attacks in midair?

The moment those thoughts swirled around my head, the Angels' powers swelled up explosively.
From their bodies, like steam, power, magic, divinity gushed out. The growing golden holy aura, even from the eyes of a Demon like me, seemed divine.

My body felt the sudden elevation of my enemy's power, and I could grasp it in an instant.
Their powers were now in the higher tiers of Knight Class. Were they holding back up to now? To quantify it, they individually increased two fold for all five of them. That difference was exceedingly large.

But still, my superiority hasn't been shaken.

The nine Angels held out their hands, as if to seek answers from the heavens.
They were quite clearly preparing an attack. To match that, I took a large swing with Celeste.

The Demon Flames grilled my arms. It's the compensation for raising the blade's power output.
Raising the output several times for a single strike, a pillar of flames rose from me.

I endured the pain akin to my body being torn apart and got the power under my control when a pillar of light from the Heavens came down on me.

The intensity of the light darkened my vision. Celeste's crimson, and the Angels' white clashed, and the resultant waves caused the café, and the houses around it to sway.
The three tables lined up alfresco were shot away all at once, and they shattered upon hitting the wall. Hiding behind me, Zeta lowered his body, as he looked up at the clash of light and fire.

An Angel gave a vulgar chuckle.
That bearing makes it so I can't see them actually governing any Justice.

And the laugh was the faster of the two.

I understood when I first saw their Skill. These guys… without a doubt, they're nothing to that Devouring Lord.
Ki ki ki, no I guess I picked the wrong target to compare.

Back when my attack clashed with that of a certain Zebul Glaucus', it was pure opposition. I didn't hold back, and I didn't have the leisure to do so.
No matter how much power I poured into it, I wouldn't push forward at all, as if I was dealing with an absolute wall. It was as if the entire world was my opponent, and I wasn't able to stop the fear in my heart, but these guys are different.

"… Well, I guess that all there is to it."

I swung Celeste again. With just that, the dragon of fire's force increased, and it swallowed up the light all too easily to scorch the heavens.

It shot through the very center of their formation, and a number of Angels were instantly burnt black before falling to the earth.

The laughter from the sky ceased.
An Angel's form didn't differ too much from a Demon's. With shapes that took after the human race, their ivory-white vestments fluttered in the wind. Their glass ball-like colorless eyes followed their falling comrades. But in them, there wasn't an expression of fear or impatience.

… Even when half of them had fallen.

… Just what is this feeling?
Even Angels are supposed to have emotions. For them to be this inorganic…

Feeling an unfamiliar sense of dread, I held Celeste aloft.

At the same time, the Angels spread out.
They flew out in every direction. I wouldn't say their speed was higher than that of a Demon's, but there're no set roads in the sky. No obstacles either.
The air is their playground. Their mobility is exceedingly high.

The crimson blade cried out.
The directionless swirl of Mana flashes out once more to cover the sky.
Celeste is demanding fuel. Even if it's a sword, it's an article manufactured by Demons. A single blade birthed for the purpose of opposing God. Its personality is the worst.
The flames raging on left and right flew out at a speed that the heavenly wings were unable to surpass.

The Angels that split into five directions were burned, and one fell to the ground.

The difference in power was all too clear.
The difference in equipment, as long as I had Celeste was my overwhelming victory, and the situation transpired with that advantage on my side.
The moment I was able to bat down their Iustitia Skills so easily, my victory was certain.

I ignored the painful heat feedback from the sword, and licked my lips.

"… Something's wrong with this picture."

It's not as if there was no resistance. And the presence of the Angel that fell to the ground had definitely faded out.
But, still… right, if I had to say, then I'm simply unsatisfied with it. I can't see what their intentions were.
Perhaps this was what Zeta felt when he was fruitlessly nabbing all those memories.

I brushed away an arrow of light from up high with Celeste.
The Angel that had lay in wait to use a Skill was burnt to cinders.

… Three of them left.

An even greater chill than before came over my body.

"Deije… san… these guys are…"

"… Seriously, what trickery is this…"

Dazzling lights blocked out the sky.
The air was astir. On the power opposing a Demon's base, a wave of divine magic made the world shake, as if it were crying out beneath it.
Enough to make that previous display of power look like mere child's play. If I had to compare the scopes of power, it must be at least ten times of that before.
Meaning from when I first saw that group from before, it was twenty times higher.

It's like an army of ten Angels becoming two hundred.

Against an opponent of this scale, even with a General here, I can't make a definity judgement on the outcome.

But that's not where the problem is. What I have to care about isn't something useless like that.

The extent of how far their power had fluctuated from the starting point went against an Angel's nature.
That was the strangest thing I had to put my mind to.

"That can't be… it can grow that much? Were they hiding their true power? No, there shouldn't be any meaning behind suppressing it all the way up to here…"

The Angel remnants numbered three. But every one of them was clad in a dreadful divinity.
Rank-wise, they had far surpassed Knight, and if they were Demon, they'd be in General range without a doubt.

I'm not sure when they appeared, but the three Angels drew white swords from their hips.
It's a Skill I've seen some place, sometime before.

Right, those are the holy swords the Angels of Justice used in the war back then.

An Iustitia Skill
『Sin Breaker』

It isn't a Knight-class Skill.
Emitting light, the heavenly wings flapped. Rise, glide, and descend.
The speed they came down was fitting of the term Godspeed. It's been said that high ranking Angels move at the speed of light, but these ones are reasonably fast themselves.

Perhaps they thought they were at a disadvantage in a long-range battle. The demon-slaying sword of light entered my field of vision.
It was as if it were a coordinated attack. Only the prideful smiles plastered on their faces indicated that this action was nothing of the sort.

Their fighting style was crude. No techniques or anything. But only in power alone did they excel.
I don't even have the time to let out a sigh.

"… Well, well, this is getting to be a pain."

What fools.
Against an Avaritia Demon, what's more, against me, they contest with swordplay?

The sword of justice coming at my eyes went out in an instant.
In my lower-left hand, I could feel the sensation of gripping a new weapon. Upon seeing his weapon suddenly vanish from within his hand, the Angel froze up for a moment, and I slashed upwards at him with the stolen sword.

Even when turned against its wielder, the Sin Breaker showed its power without a moment's regret.
I put strength into my lower body to stop his bullet-like kinetic energy. The arm that swung the sword felt a heavy burden.
As he already flapped his wings to retreat, while his body received a deep slash wound, he still returned high into the air.
As he shot up, I delivered a follow-up swing, and even with the light to his back, I could clearly see the face of terror dawn on him. Unlike when the others were burned up by Celeste, a look of despair swept over his face several times before he ceased.

With a thud, the power-less angel's body rolled along the ground.

He was definitely strong. If I took that divinity head on, there's no way I'd get away unhurt.
But that's all. I just don't have to take it head on. Generally, both Angels and Demons place an emphasis on offense rather than defense.
Meaning those rare exceptions that specialized in defense- such as Boss Leigie- aside, the rest of us had to dodge in order to survive.

But these guys don't even have a sense for that.

It's a complete mismatch. Their power isn't matching their battle experience.
They're not even measuring their opponent's attribute, and their attacks are nothing but sheer stupidity.
That's why even without weapons, I should be able to drop them easily. Using melee weapons against Greed is pretty much asking for them to be stolen. It's because there are plenty of those sorts of Skills on the Avaritia Skill Tree.

It's by no means a bad thing for me that the enemy's weak.
While I may have the instincts for battle, I'm not a battle junkie like that Heard Lauder. If I can easily attain results, then there's nothing better.

"… Two left."

"Deije-san… you sure are strong…"

"The enemy's just weak."

I lightly returned Zeta's words. They're my honest feelings. This can't be all there was to those wars with Heaven.

The remaining two were suspended in the air.
Male Angels. As if they had been mechanically mass produced, two similar face, four eyes in total, glared at me.
What was there was either hatred or sorrow.

Two high class Angels.
But I don't get the feeling I'll lose against them.
I'll take down the first one, apprehend the second one, and have Zeta take his memories.
General Class or not, we'll just take everything.

What's the problem? 'Tis but a simple matter. Compared to over ten thousand years of hell.

I gripped Celeste strongly again.
My arm had already become quite burnt by its aura. It's compensation. The feedback to its wielder.
Those that use the blade to its limits are fated to be reduced to ash. It's a legend with no proof to back it, but the blade was clad in a force devilish enough to give it some credibility.

I haven't fallen enough to have to rely on it to that extent.

With a sneer an Angel raised a disciplinary voice.
It was an irritating high cry that howled in the back of my ears. Unable to bear it, Zeta covered his ears, and squatted on the spot.

The world was shaking. Rumbling. Oscillating.
But it's not as if anything was truly moving. It was a wave of divinity great enough to give off that illusion.
The Demon World's air was dyed. From jet black to pure white. Darkness to light.

Zeta's eyelids convulsed at the abnormal situation, as he watched the figure of one of the Angels.
Just what the hell is this… I never heard anything about it.

No, could it be…

"It can rise… even further? Dammit…"

Making me see an illusion of the Angel's body expanding, the passively released holy aura from them neither exceeded nor fell short of the pillar of light they released none too long ago.
Their rising power carved up the sky, and split the clouds.
The trembling of my body I had contained with the thoughts of battle started up once more, and I used everything in my power to put a halt to it once more.

The power I felt from the Angel completely surpassed mine at this point.

Vanity's 『Abyss Zone』 eroded away, and shattered.
What expanded in its place was a pure and divine feeling. It was as if god's blessings themselves were pouring down on the land in orbs of light, and a silver wind overwrote the lingering miasma.
From the increase in power, the Angel's disposition went through a complete change.
From their meaningless holy aura, and expressions that gave off a somewhat manufactured feeling, to eyes in which dwelled strong fighting spirit.

"This… is…"

"… Oy, oy, give me a break already…"

The Demon Lord Class doesn't exist among Angels. But to identify those among them with Demon Lord level powers, the Angels of that rank were referred to as follows.

『Saint Lord』

Demons and Angels were opposing souls.
Black and white. Darkness and light. Evil and good.

Therefore, through our very natures, we were always predestined to oppose one another.
Their existence was, among our natural enemies, the worst and greatest foe.

"Tsk, what the hell… a Lord descended to the Demon World!!?"

"…"

Lords have obligations. They have land. They have subjects. That didn't change among Angels and Demons.
While Angels would occasionally drop by the Demon World, there's barely a memory within me of a Lord coming down here.

I'm not sure if they were even listening to my words, as the Angel didn't respond.
He merely silently pointed his extended finger, and gathered Mana into a single point of light.

"!?"

My instincts as a soldier. My experience up to now made my body instinctively leap to the side.
In the next instant, the light was released. Its speed was close to pure light itself, and a high ranking Demon like me with enhanced perception couldn't even follow its afterimage. It was overwhelmingly separated from that arrow of light aimed at me before, a power suited to a true Lord.

The light that missed me by chance bored into the café terrace, and after a brief moment, my body was assailed the lights and the sounds.
A thunderous roar rocked my eardrums, and my failing five senses were forcefully recovered with my anti-status-abnormality Skill.
I used my instincts to guide my falling body.

My field of vision spun.

I confirmed the form of Zeta's injured body on the ground. It's fine. Something of that extent won't kill a Knight Class Demon.
I confirmed my own situation. It's not like I took a direct hit from the attack, the shockwave from it merely hit me from behind, and this level of damage isn't one that'll hinder my movement.

Why, for what reason did a Lord of Angels descend to such a desolate place, I haven't the slightest idea. I don't even want to know.

My luck was in that I hadn't let go of Celeste in that instant.
Greed Skills don't have a high damage output. Losing the Demon Blade would

definitely be a fatal loss.

And if I have this in my hands, then I stand a chance against a Saint Lord of Heaven.

My thoughts are become severely twisted from my chance meeting with my arch foe. The instincts shaking my very soul clear up my field of vision.
The light he shot from his finger. Its output and speed were definitely adequate for a Lord's Skill.

I bent my legs to kill the impact, and corrected my stance.
My left hand held the『Sin Breaker』.
My right,『Celeste』.

As that fingertip pointed at me once more, I swung the Demon Blade.
The dragon of fire shot out to devour the Angel.
The light came down to annihilate me.

Celeste's flames definitely had a wider scope, but the Angel's blasts were all concentrated on a single point.
The light leisurely moved forward while ripping through the dragon's innards. It was unable to stop its advance.

And as if to defend the gap in the Angel's defense, the other Angel stepped forward.

In my fright, the power slackened for a moment. Using that, the light increased in speed.
I couldn't even feel another presence that large until now, but the other one definitely gave off the same feeling as the first.
This can't be… what's the meaning of this? What the hell is going on!?

"Lord of Angels… two of them!?"

I could barely surmount the gap in power with one, yet I have to face both. The Lords that hadn't shown their faces in ten thousand years were lining up as if I were having a nightmare.
I couldn't discern a single thought from their expressions, and all I could really pick up was that they were determined to kill me.

It'll only get worse at this rate. I leapt to the side, and the light finished its way through the dragon I lost control of to pierce the ground I was at before.
Even when I haven't taken a single attack head on, my entire body was giving an aching pain.

Should I retreat?
Can I even retreat? Against these monsters?
Oddly enough, I began to recall when I withdrew from Boss Leigie's army a year ago.

Fate. Is my fate going to cast me away here?
After having escaped that Demon Lord of Pride, Heard Lauder, I'm going to die here?

A sensation ran up from my toes to my head.
A dark heat pouring out of my soul gave strength to my body.

"K ki ki, interesting, ain't it? If you think you can, then come at me."

I held the Demon Blade above my head. The Lords of Angels cautiously took a step back.
Celeste's flames were peerless. But in the end, a Demon Blade was still a sword at its base.

It was made in order to rend.

My soul continues to let off a dull pain.

I kicked the ground strongly, and thrust.
I twisted my body. I concentrated the entire kinetic energy of my frame into the blade, and threw.

The Demon blade became a crimson comet as it came at the Saint Lords. The magic it usually used to create large scale flames was all being concentrated on the tip, and this blow was definitely the highest I could release at the moment.
But without witing for the result, I ran over, and took up Zeta in my arms.

"Hah, hah… gu… are we running?"

"Ki ki ki, life's only to be lived if you survive."

Treasure and riches, you can pile up as much as you want as long as you live on. There isn't even a point in equating them.
A high-pitched voice of song I took to be the Angels' screams struck my ears. But without even learning of what effect it as supposed to carry, my status abnormality resistance activated, and erased it.
All that was left was to run. Angels possess frightening mobility, but if I take cover in a town, it will be a pain to search from the skies. There are plenty of places to hide.

And there was some merit to my flight.
There's no way Vanity didn't notice the fact that an Angel appeared here. In this case, his zone was even broken.
『Abyss Zone』 wasn't just a Skill to offer enhancements to friendly troops.
It was an enlargement of a Demon Lord's sense of perception. It let them sense if enemy troops even set foot on their lands.

If I can keep myself on my feet until the army arrives, it's my win. If I'm found, I lose.
Ki ki ki, what a disadvantageous gamble.

While it may not be that wide, I'll be completely out in the open on the main street. If they were to shoot that light at me from behind, it's the end.
In the past week, I've gotten a map of the town into my head. Those guys shouldn't be familiar with the place, and ironically enough, from our memory theft, we know all the points with few pedestrians, and bad visibility. Never thought it would aid in our own escape, though.

The moment I turned into a side alley, I noticed a figure collapsed at my feet.
With a khaki overcoat wrapped around their body, a Demon boasting a small build. At the same time, that form was one I'd gotten familiar with in this one week.
It was the Demon that was always hunched over the table at the café terrace. I was also there for quite a bit of time, so while there wasn't a day I didn't catch sight of him, I had started percieveing him as part of the background.

… Could it be this one was at the terrace?

Seeing the Demon still face down, and unmoving, I hesitated for a moment. But I didn't have the time for that.
I resolved myself, and lifted the Demon up by the scruff of the neck.

I don't really care, but leaving this one behind would go against my style.
I won't call it good will, but if I had to say, it's just a whim. In the first place, with my strength, carrying one or two doesn't really make a difference, and because I cast away Celeste, I have an arm or two to spare.

I gripped his neck as if hoisting up a kitten, and when I lifted, the hood flew off.

Instinctively, I threw the Demon behind me with all my might.
Upon having the mass of Khaki chucked at them, the approaching Angels were brought to a momentary halt.

Atop my shoulder, Zeta cried out.

"W-what was that all about!? All of a sudden…"

"Like… hell… why…"

Just how should I express these thoughts racing through my head?
Terror. Surprise. Confusion. Amazement. All of them intermingled, but if I were to summarize it into a word, it would have to be 'dumbfound'.

The two Angels whose presences I couldn't sense.
The two Angel Lords.

The culmination of all the consecutive events beyond my wildest dreams.
Greater than angels, a miraculous nightmare.

I tried to open my mouth to convey it in words, but my thoughts wouldn't come together. I didn't know what to say.
I frantically moved my mouth, and what my seesawing emotions finally fell on was weariness.

"So even Boss Leigie's… played his hand this time…"

I'm not sure what my mind was coming to, but the only image that floated in it was the form of a sluggish Lord of Sloth.

Chapter 2: Gula's Starvation

Part 1: I'm full

Why did I go to such extents to consume such things?

I've received such a foolish query time after time after time…

It was a dialogue pointless enough to make me hold my stomach in laughter.
I'll bet there's nothing in this world more meaningless than a Demon's desire.
It's not that these longings exist because of us Demons.
It's because these longings exist that Demons live on. That's why you can't call a sinless Demon a Demon.

… And… and just as I've become one who can't provide an immediate response to that senseless quandary, I guess I'm no longer something you could call a Demon either.

My awakening was a coincidence, yet also an inevitability.
My soul did definitely go out once, but as if it still had lingering regret, it displayed its gluttonous will-power, and returned.

Hazily, as if surfacing from a deep well of water, my consciousness came up, and naturally, the first thought that came to my mind was, 'why?'
Even if I may have been a Demon Lord who built up much power over a perpetual existence, a soul that's been extinguished can never return. There's no such thing as a second life. There shouldn't be.

But I found my answer soon enough.

Reflected in my sluggishly adjusting field of vision was a field of pebbles that went on to eternity.
Unable to understand what had happened, unable to fathom what to do, I simply leisurely surveyed my surroundings.

I should have been smack dab in the middle of a battlefield, but on the black soil was neither the Lord of Sloth nor his subordinates, and from the fact there wasn't even the traces of the flames from that Demon Blade around, I determined that a considerable amount of time had passed.

In my daze, I turned to the palm of my hand. My body was practically the same as the one I boasted before. The limbs I had become accustom to, even after taking so much damage from that lazy Lord, were left without a scratch, and I could make smooth movements without any support. It was as I the complex fracturing of my bones I felt in battle had been but a dream.

Simply, on a land that was nothing but vast, the Demon World's stars that hadn't changed in several tens of thousands of years shone down on me.
The words that came to my mouth without meaning were blotted with tears.

"Haa… haa… he didn't break my core… Leigie, are you not… an idiot?"

The reasons I was able to successfully revive likely numbered three.

First. Leigie' Skill did destroy my body quite thoroughly, but it was unsuccessful in crushing a Demon's heart, my soul core.
Second. His subordinates didn't even doubt my death, and they didn't confirm said core.
Third. The Dark Prison's land was vast, and in the time my soul core spent regenerating, no opposing force happened to pass by.

If even one of those had gone astray, my consciousness would have drifted into an eternal hell, the depths of a true Dark Prison, and never surfaced again.

… Well, I'll put aside whether that was a good thing or not.

Anyways, I confirmed that there was nothing wrong with my body. If there were, it would have to be with my heart.
Throwing myself down on the Dark Prison's soil, the dark color of gunpowder, I looked up at the sky.
Still in a trance. Even when I hadn't even started to think about it, the words poured out.

"Fufu… so I'm to… live in shame."

I doubt this was done by the Lord of Sloth's will. That man wasn't one who would do anything so troublesome.
But, still, it's quite certain that I lost. While bearing the name of the Devouring Lord, I met the first inedible matter in the course of my life.
And the satisfaction I felt at the very end of the end was enough to fill me up.

"I'm already full…"

I was satisfied. Not an iota of my hunger remained.
The moment when I resolved myself for death is one things, but now that it's been extended to my life, it's quite an ominous sensation.
My hunger was my enemy, and yet my friend. It's only because it was there that I was a Demon Lord, and I was able to eat up all of creation.

With that gone, the current me isn't even a Demon, and while this goes without saying, I'm definitely no Angel. I must be quite a fragment of an existence.

"Leigie, the truth is… you made me think it for the first time."

Thank you for the meal.

My last supper had long drawn itself to a close. Then what is with the current situation?
There's no god in hell. If there was, then what logic did he work by to put me on this land once more?

My comrades and vassals are gone. I've eaten everything. Even my family.
And this time, this time, my closest friend from over a hundred thousand years ago, my hunger, is gone.

Complete loss. In spite of my satisfaction, an abyss incomparable to starvation had opened up in my stomach.
After dying once, and reviving here, perhaps that was my compensation.

"Fufu… well, fine. If that' how it is, I'll play along a bit longer."

With no goal or will, I'll spend a life simply continuing down this endless path. How cruel must it be.
Even if I lack an objective, since I've already gotten on the rails, since I've already faced defeat, I've a need to tag along.

Also, if I do that, perhaps I'll be able to touch the purpose of that Lord of Sloth's power.
If I do that, then perhaps I'll learn the reason my hunger lost.

"Well, maybe wandering the Demon World without purpose for a while won't be too bad…"

I was always fighting. I was always devouring.
All just to sate my hunger.
Those were definitely absurd, and sweet, and fun days, but if I look back now, I was just being pushed around by my desire. After being cut off from my sense of starvation, I've realized that for the first time.

Then if it's now, with my hunger lost, with me not even as a Demon…

The view of this Demon World should become a little different from back when I was a Demon Lord.
Let's leave behind the world I called my dining table, and find a new one.

Moving my limbs for the first time in a while, I propped up my body, and stood.
A lukewarm wind brushed against my body. Noticing I wasn't wearing anything, I let out a sigh.
Naked is embarrassing… that's a sentiment I lost in a time long passed, but being left in this uncouth state isn't good. It would be inexcusable to the ones that disappeared into my stomach, the Demons of Gluttony who served me up until the end.

Well, perhaps this second take at life would be more insulting to them than anything, though…

Without uttering a word, I used a Skill.
I was just a little anxious, but even without my hunger, I was able to operate Gula Skills without a problem.
The manifestation of starvation. An unfathomably deep darkness gathered, and wrapped around my body. To me, these were my clothes for battle clothes, and at the same time, my ceremonial garments.
Gluttony Skills specialized in attack, so it's not like they'll really be of use as armor, but it's much more decent than being naked.

For arguments sake, I searched for my favored sword, but it didn't seem to be littered anywhere around.
That one was my favorite, and it's likely in the hands of one of Leigie's subordinates at this point. There was a Greed Demon there, so perhaps it's with him.
Well, that all doesn't really matter. Even that Greed-kun who whetted my appetite to that extent, now that I'd lost my appetite, held no more meaning to me then the countless foodstuffs scattered around the dirt.

"… I guess I should get going…"

I whispered.
I already knew what I was going to do.
I'll meet Leigie again. For that sake, I'll start walking forward. That was the only premise. When the girl he was supposed to have killed appeared before his eyes, just what sort of face would that man make? I was looking forward to it just a bit.

I gave an order to my body, which felt heavier than it ever had before, and put one foot out.
Just how desolate is this reality without hunger?

It's not like I'm damaged at all. Neither have my muscles declined in the slightest.
Simply through the fact I wasn't properly embracing a desire, through the fact I no longer held any strong will, it seems my body will become this hard to move.

The Demon World's map had names stuck onto it by the color of the soil, and the atmosphere surrounding it. Even if I didn't know my exact location, I had a general idea.
The surrounding region, all the way to the horizons, was filled with pebbles of black, with some ash colors mixed in here and there, taking in the sun's light without end.
And fitting of the name of the Lord of these lands, meaningless air filled with gloomy mana as if to lower one's spirits.
It's the proof of how, over long years, revieving power from the Lord of Sloth, the environment underwent a change.

Even thinking back to my oldest memories, it's not hard to remember how this was always the Dark Prison ruled by Leigie of Acedia.
Meaning if I proceed like this, then Leigie's stronghold… I'll arrive at the Castle of Shadows.

But is that really alright?

Isn't that like skipping the story, and directly going out to challenge the last boss?
By my estimate, my own power hasn't declined, but that's merely another peculiarity.
A Demon's power is their cravings. There's no way the current me that doesn't embrace hunger is of the same strength as the one full of nice and healthy appetite.

I hesitated for a few seconds, and decided to alter my objective.
At the moment, I don't hold the will to confront the Lazy King. I don't have any will to begin with.
It's no good to head straight for him. At the very least, getting a grasp on my own situation, and the current situation of the Demon World comes first. I've never experienced being regenerated from my soul core before, but I can guess that it hasn't been a short amount of time.

I mean, I have all the time I need. With my need to eat gone, looking back, it's been a frighteningly long time I've spent.

A map floated up in my head.
I thought of the closest fiefs to Leigie's unified lands.

The Egoist, Vanity Seidthroan. The Crimson Prison ruled by a Lord of Superbia.
Tyler Gredmore. The Golden Prison ruled by a Lord of Avaritia.

The one with the greater power would be Vanity, but the current me didn't have the heart to take on a Greed Demon. To line up a feast before me when I'm not even hungry, the thought alone sends shivers up my spine.
Vanity's pride was, strangely enough, not violent. With that in mind, it'd probably be best to set out for the Crimson Prison for now. His army's quality isn't that high, so even if my sustained existence is to be found out, I doubt they'll chase me too far.

After thinking that far, I noticed. Even without some grandiose goal, even when my hunger was non-existent, I was trying to live on.
That was just too strange, and I ended up giving a bitter smile.

"… Fufu… fu for my instinct for survival to still functions without desire…"

It looks like I'll have to change up my opinion on life a little.

I let out a sigh of grief, and began walking across the black earth, that seemed to extend on forever.

Part 2: Maybe if my Appetite Returns

A change in the situation always comes abruptly.

Even for a Demon Lord with absurdly wide perception, we cannot see the future.
Last year's me never even imagined that I would ever lose my hunger, and I never thought it would become this hard to move either.

To demons embracing their longings, those longings were their will to live. Perhaps I never truly understood what that meant until after I revived.
A world without hunger, as if I was seeing a dream, lacked a sense of reality.
While I had found myself in a new world, to me, it didn't fall short of the depths of hell.

I was in a small town of the Crimson Prison I had reached by chance. And there, I ran out of power. I lost my will to do anything, and spent who knows how long collapsed at some café or another, forgetting an innumerable amount of things.
I'm sure I had a plan. But the black hole drilled into the center of my heart wouldn't allow it.
Any and everything is but a trifle. To me, my appetite was a desire I could barely stand, but also the highest form of pleasure.
On the table of a dirty casual café, I fell flat. It was an action so pointless in nature I couldn't even laugh at the Lord of Sloth anymore.

At the start, someone or another tried to talk to me, but perhaps getting tired of me not offering a single action in return, that came to an end all too soon. I also get the feeling I took a few Skills directed at my body as well, but contrary to my state, the Gluttony Skills I had honed over my life nullified all of them.

I'm not hungry at all. Yet still, my power shows no signs of dying out. It won't decrease. No, more so, even when I'm not eating anything at all, I get the feeling it's on the rise.

That was one of the few truths I came to learn upon returning from the abyss of death, and it was also something I should have been shocked at.
It's not like I was simply eating in order to gain power, but when I'm growing stronger without doing anything at all, I somehow feel that all I've done up to now has been pointless.

I simply sat, and within the quiet darkness, I thought about its meaning. Without the desire that had always shaken up my existence, I had enough thinking time for my brain to rot.

I even get the feeling that I'll be able to grasp something given just a little bit more.

But for some reason, today's been quite noisy.

The sounds. The lights. A somewhat nostalgic wave of magic was coloring my world. Whether I liked it or not, I perceived it all around me.

I wonder if some sort of accident's transpired. Even for Demons, in times of peace, the towns should have some peace and quiet. Especially with the place I was at not being any sort of major city. It was simply a remote settlement. If I was in the land of a hostile Demon Lord, that would be one thing, but this isn't the front lines of anything. I can't imagine who'd attack who here.

But if you turn that around, if it's a rare occurrence, that means it can happen now and again. Those reckless enough to attack the cities of the Demon Lords allied to the Great Demon King come out regularly.
The information coming through my five senses told me that the town had been dragged into some form of war.

But the power ringing out around me, the forms, and the sounds, with the burden I felt on my body, they were fruitless stimulus.

They're not at a level where they'll harm a Demon Lord like me, and it's not like…

… It's not like I'll be able to eat them anyways.

Perhaps someone died. Several sources of power went out, and several of them swelled up.
It was probably the after effect of the blasts. The table supporting my body was blown away, and my body was thrown onto the ground. Again, I'm uninterested.
Having been tossed onto the earth, I stretched out my flawless tongue, and took a taste of the ground.

… It's not half bad. It's definitely not bad, but my appetite isn't whetted at all.
Since my revival, I've tried putting various sorts of food before myself. But still, there's no signs of anything coming back.

It's not like it's inedible, but I don't want to eat it. That feeling was one of a variety that, since my birth, I'd rarely ever tasted.
It's also not something I felt when I confronted the Lord of Sloth. Those back there were negative feelings, but what I'm feeling right now is surely zero.

Apparently, even non-Gluttony Demons will feel hunger with the passage of time. That information did give me some optimism about my present condition, but I can

now say that my current state is of a problem beyond that level.

"… Hah, I wonder what happened… for me to not feel anything to this extent…"

At this point, the hunch that I might not be a Demon anymore started turning into my certainty.
Is this that sort of, 'truth from a lie' sort of thing…

But still, what's with this…

While I was thinking something like that, I was grabbed by the scruff of the neck, and hoisted up. My build isn't too tall, so I don't think any large Demon would have too much of a problem doing that, but it's quite amazing that they were able to do that without saying a single word to me.
The hood that was intercepting the sunlight flew off, and I saw the face of the one who lifted me.
Curling horns that grew at the top of his head, and six eyes were the Demon's characteristics. And to me, who lost all of my comrades, it was the first familiar face I'd seen in a long time.
Leigie's subordinate Greed-kun. One of the few existences in this world that I tried, and failed to eat.
But even with one I thought of as tasty before my eyes, I don't really feel anything.

Greed-kun's eyes went over my face expressionlessly for a moment. The stare from his six pupils met with mine.
And in the next instant, without saying anything, still without an emotion on his face, Greed-kun chucked me with all of his might.

I was thrown. As if throwing a ball, easily, without hesitation.

How cruel… to throw me away after going through all the trouble of picking me up…

Perhaps he added some spin onto the toss, as my field of vision spun all over the place. On an incredible wind, and an impact great enough to rock my semicircular canals, without any real feelings, I put power into my body for once in a while, waited for the right timing, and made a landing on the ground.

Even if I've lost my desire, that's something irrelevant to Greed-kun.
Hey, at least let my keep my pride. I try not to show my unsightly face, and try to strain my voice, but when it came out, I couldn't help but think it was tinted with a tired tone.

"… Well, well, well, you sure do some cruel things there… to acquaintances no less…"

"W-w-why the hell are you at a place like this!!?"

"Fufu… I wonder."

His confusion was enough to make me crack a smile.
Nice reaction. That's a nice face you're making there. As always, his appearance is fitting for one called a Demon. Greed-kun's figure, of course, but also his gestures haven't changed in the slightest from when I saw him last.
It would be nice if Leigie would give a reaction like that too, but…

"Of all else, I'm the one who's wondering why you're at a place like this, Greed-kun…

what a coincidence.”

“This sort of coincidence… I don’t need it. Boss, please give me a break already…”

Looks like I’m quite hated. Fufu, even when I just went and devoured his collection a little… What a narrow-minded child.
Well, I doubt I’d even be able to do something like that at this point.

Saved by his reaction, my tension that had been brought down to the lowest possible level rose ever-so-slightly.

I could finally confirm the situation.

I smelled a scent that made my nose twitch.
Greed-kun, and the lone young boy Demon he was shouldering… that’s also a Greed-kun. Fufu, he smells like the type that steals emotions. There aren’t any other Demons around. Like a bubble of air, this entire area’s become completely empty.

But more than that, the problem’s likely the enemy.
Enemy… prey. Nice ring to that.

I turned my eyes to the side.
Two sculpture-like males. Wearing pure white vestments, their large builds boasted a pair of white wings of light on their backs. Heavenly messengers. Showing off their dark intent to kill us all in their silver eyes, these natural enemies of Demon-kind were lined up right in the middle of the Demon World without a moment’s hesitation.
As if one of the two had been replicated, they looked like two peas in a pod. The large presences they wore around themselves were a single widely pronounced symbol of fear to our race.
If you do something bad, the Angels will come for you, the parents say… Fufu.

“Two Angels… Fufu, it sure has been a while since I’ve seen the form of an Angel… it sure is regrettable that I can’t eat them.”

Their light presences, that had so little impurity in them they began to feel unnatural.
Even for someone with a perpetual existence like me, a force I rarely had a chance to meet: high ranking Angels. What’s more, the higher rank of those high ranks.

『Saint Lord』 Class.

This white light eating away at all the surroundings was the polar opposite of the 『Abyss Zone』of Demon Lords.
It must be none other than the 『Paradise Field』 Skill that only Angel Lords possess.

Their Divinity had a nasty nature of wiping away the Mana held by Demons.
In territories under the reign of Angels, we’re unable to wield our powers to our satisfaction.

Both of the Angel’ eyes were directed at me, the unexpected trespasser.
Even if you look at me like that… this isn’t my will, you know. Fufu, I was just kinda thrown, you know.
Yeah, I’ve just been thrown around. If you want someone here to resent, then go after that Greed-kun, okay?

The Angels’ Killing intent, enough to shake one’s soul, gave a jolt to my instincts. It’s

not appetite. This must be those battle instincts that other Demons speak about.
Greed-kun called out.

"Zebul, I'll give you a warning for old time's sake. It'd be best if you ran! Ki ki ki, taking on two would be tough, even for you."

Even when you just used me as a projectile, that's quite mean.
But that may just be my misguided resentment there.

"Fu fu… who do you think you're speaking to here?"

I'm an undefeated Lord. No, wait, I lost to Leigie, so I'm a once defeated Lord.
In a hundred thousand years of life, one loss. I can't even remember the amount of things I've eaten. Never fleeing, never facing loss.

If you want to call that good luck, then go ahead, but more than that, my Gula disposition let me specialize in offense.

The use of my Skills were accompanied by a sort of uplifting feeling. Without saying anything, I started using them for once in quite a while.

… Fufufu, my bad, Vanity. I'll be taking these ones.

The black aura of darkness that gathered with me at the center tainted that divinity.
A bottomless black that seemed to devour every color around it, that dark power that seemed to represent hunger itself was, even when its user had lost her desire, in good health.
I washed away that annoying holy air those Angels were spewing all at once, and dyed their white with my black.
The force that wouldn't permit any resistance was, while I had lost my starvation, the proof I was still a Lord.

To eat up and defile all creation, a Gula Demon's right.

"I can't believe it… you ate their Paradise Field!?"

"Fu… I haven't eaten anything. It's just that my power was the stronger of the two. That's all."

Having their Field destroyed, the Angels' silver eyes let off a dangerous light.
It wasn't fear. Simply, their newfound will to fight me let out a slimy light. It wasn't anything different than what Angel usually embraced whenever they were slaying Demon.
Strong light gathered in the palms of their hands. Unlike that let off by the Demon World's crimson sun, it was a white light. Without even an incantation, their speed was like lightning, and their flowing movements gave off the impression they were accustom to firing off such bolts.
But I saw through it in an instant. The memories of the war of White and Black still lingered in my mind. Even if they haven't appeared as of late, the nature of these things wasn't something I could forget so easily.

Ah, that's…

I licked my lips. Even when I didn't have an appetite, I was drooling.

… It sure was fun back then.

A quivering excitement ran from the base of my feet up my spine. All of my memories could be summed up with the word, 'Tasty.'
That was a wonderful time. It was even regretful that it had to come to an end.

"Fufu… so you guys are『Iustitia』Angels?"

"……!?"

The time from collecting to shooting off their energy was a matter of seconds. Theirs was an attribute designed for rapid fire, and it boasted a high offensive power in order to bring ruin to Demons.
they shot off a light so dense, I couldn't even keep my eyes open.
And without a chance to dodge, a large impact raced through my body.

An Angel's power was much different from a Demons. Anyways, it was fast.
Their speed truly rivalled light. No matter how much speed you had, you would be unable to outrun it; it was worthy of the name Heavenly Retribution.

Yep, it was probably worthy of that.
Definitely.

"Fufufuf

Still… it wasn't tasty at all. I'm sure it tasted quite fine when I last partook ten thousand years ago, but…

How unfortunate, but there's nothing to be done.
Even if I'm not to eat, Angels and Demons are opposing forces.
Fufu, how about I hitch a ride on that theory for a while?
I turned the palm of my own hand to the two Angels.

"I'll show you a darkness that devours all light."

As if taking those words as a trigger, the Angels' wings began emitting light once more.

But at that point, I had already fired off my Wave of Starvation. The wave that gradually encroached on them was the hunger my soul thrived of in itself. For the longest time, it was the curse that obeyed my will.

As the light passed through the depths of the darkness, it was eaten up, and faded away.
The bland turned to pure energy, and filled my body. I'm not soft enough to be done in by elementary Skills.

I birthed countless 『Tentacles』 from my body. Because my own two arms had proven insufficient, I became able to create them. They were my hands.
They numbered a hundred. Of course, that number vastly exceeded the Angels' limbs, and also Greed-kun's hands.

The Angels' expressions warped in disgust. Nice expression. That's a nice face you're making there.

"Then, I'll start."

Ten for movement. The other ninety for attack.
I manipulate my tentacles like whips to swipe at the angels from the side.
Perhaps not in the mood to be touched by them, the two Angels acted in unison. Their wings let off light, and they flew up vertically to avoid.
It was one of their selling points. Something that even lower class Angels possessed without exception- their heavenly wings… their mobility.
And as a Gula Demon with numerous means of attack, regardless of distance, I had a good affinity here.

As I swung one tentacle horizontally, I extended another up high, and brought it down at them.
And I extend another. Once you get to my level, the tentacles' numbers and lengths can be freely manipulated and changed.

For the one coming at them from above, the Angels barely dodged to the said.
As they dodged, from the palms of their hands, they shot of large Novas, several times the power of their previous attack.
The balls of light numbered in the dozens. Masses of destructive energy cause the townscape to change. They shot them off without properly deciding a target, so they hit building after building, causing their collapse.
The ground shook greatly. Power great enough to alter the terrain. But with an increase in destructive power, the speed dropped off. As the came at me with speeds

much lower than their light, there wasn't the space for me to dodge.

I packed power into the tentacles at my feet, and had them bore into the ground.
And I avoided them all. Within my Zone, I could perceive everything. I understood the area, and for the balls of light without that great a speed to begin with, I could dodge them even with my eyes closed.
And like that, receiving power from the masses of muscle that were my tentacles, In just a step, I had reached the space right below the two Angels floating in the sky. Of course, in that space of time, I didn't stop the tentacles coming at them up there either.
The skies don't belong to you guys alone. If I felt like it, then like a spider's web, I could string up my hands.

Nothing can escape from my dinner plate.

"Uge… you sure do some reckless things…"

I barely heard Greed-kun whisper to himself with a stiff expression.

Reckless?

Fufufu… that's just how a Lord's battles go.
I think your Lord's the one who's all over the place! Even if I try forgetting, I'll never be able to get that taste out of my mind!

The moment the Angels had their full attention focused on the hands coming at them from up high, I gave the ground a nice kick.
I put the tentacles I used for movement to offensive use. As a large number of Tentacles came at them from below, one of them tried diverting them, the other directed the palm of his hand at me.

Fufu, for them to still be relying on magic Skills at this point…
Of course, this isn't my place to complain. The ones who hold responsibility for this one are you guys alone
As if to match him, I also held out both my hands.

"Judgement Rain."

"The Skyeater's Darkness."

And light and dark were to clash once more.
The light tried to pierce through the darkness, and the dark to suck up the light. In a sense, it was a mini representation of our eternal struggle.

The energy I felt from that light was, without a doubt, Lord Class.
Therefore, the power I got from dissolving it was also large.

By drinking down the light, the darkness only gained in strength.
While Avaritia may be the best under the heavens at stealing, there's no one out there to contest a Gula's skill at eating.
Even so, I doubt I'll be able to stomach all this energy. No matter what, the power of darkness was always a step behind that of light.
When Lords of the same level were to duke it out, it was inevitable that the Demons would be the ones torn apart. I knew that all too well.

That's why I tempted them. With tentacles.

"Fufu… it's not good to look away like that."

I pierced the Angel's hand with a tentacle I circled around from the side. At the same time the light emitted at me changed course, and flew into the distance.
For a moment, I could see surprise on the Angel's face, and before that faded, the Angel was swallowed into my darkness.

An indescribable scream escaped his lips.
An exclamation enough to make me shiver. The power of the Angel passing through the darkness flowed into me. It's likely that at the moment, he's going through the pain of having his entire body dissolved.

The Angel passed through, and gripped my face with the palm of his hand.
I couldn't see his expression. But it was easy to imagine. It must be the expression I've always found directed at me.
And that's why, as always, I offered some words of gratitude.

"Thank you for the meal."

In a short moment, the Angel's body fully settled into my stomach. Only the remnants of his magic overflowed onto my lips.
As I thought, it's quite tasteless. It seems that he did properly raise his power level, but this is way too bland, you know…
Following the law of gravity, I landed on the ground. As long as I have these Gobbling Garments on, I don't even raise a cloud of dust, but out of habit, I patted down my trousers.

The other Angel wasn't there anymore. I knew.
The moment the first one tried to shoot of that 'Judgement Rain' attack, the second took flight. Perhaps, if the other one had stayed behind, I wouldn't have been able to pierce that Angel's hand. And even after having his comrade desert him, the emotions of the Angel firing down his judgement at me didn't shift in the slightest.

That goes to say that was their plan from the start.

"Fu… they're way too understanding. How boring…"

If they were floating around, that'd be one thing, but I've no means to catch up to an Angel flying a straight line path away
In the first place, that lack of taste doesn't let me work up a desire to give chase. The instincts for battle, the instincts for strife burned into my body were restrained upon eating that first one.

In the past, it was unthinkable for me to let an ingredient flee from before my eyes, but… well, I wonder if this isn't too bad either.

I looked around the town that had become a mountain of rubble, and found Greed-kun looking at me from a corner.
As always, that's quite some courage there. With a former enemy, a former Demon Lord before his eyes, for him not to be harboring any fear, even for a General Class Demon, that isn't an easy thing to pull off.

Well, even so, in the end, that's all he is to me…

"Ki ki ki, as always, that's some absurd power you've got…"

"Fufu… even if you call them Lords, they weren't anything to speak of."

Just as Demon Lords differed from start to finish, Saint Lords had a wide gap between the top and the bottom.
Even among them, the Lords I just met were… small fries.

Well, even then, there's no doubt they're a rare food stock to find in this vast Demon World.

I let out a large sigh, and patted my stomach.

Ah… maybe if my appetite returns…

Part 3: It's no good… I guess

I smelled it.
The table before my eyes was crammed full of various types of food.

Besides a single territory, the Demon World was covered in poverty. That's why it's a rare sight to see so many dishes spread out, but I was of a sort that didn't really mind appearances, so that didn't really matter.

… As long as it sates my hunger.

On top of a white polished plate was a meat dripping fresh blood.
As a Demon of Gluttony, I could understand. That was Dragon meat.
The raw meat of one of the few races of this Demon World able to fight on par with Demon. Of course, it was a rare delicacy, and its taste was supposed to be splendid enough to put it on the same level as Demons.

As I silently looked upon the masses of meat distributed across the plates, the large-built Demon that had brought it timidly asked a question
He was likely a Pride or Greed. I didn't know his name, or his power. His lust for the limelight alone was first-rate, and he was a pitiful man who tried attacking me when I was furrowing my brow, and slowly walking alone.

To a Demon Lord, most Demons below General Class were generally just part of the rabble. At the very least, to one that had spent long years in the position like me, even when I'd lost my cravings, I could only speak of him as 'one of those other Demons.'

"… I-is it to your tastes? It's the meat of the Crimson Dragon subjugated just the other day. Meat that won't fall short of any Demon… For someone like you that governs Gula, it must be more than a suitable offering, right?"

"… Hah…"

The Demon frantically tried to shrink his body, and his throaty voice shook. There

really isn't anything more unsightly than this.
I played around with the silver fork I took in hand, and gazed at the Dragon mean.

How troublesome. As I thought, it's not whetting my appetite. I've no mood to eat it.

It's smell wasn't bad at all, and the power exerted by the meat was quite clear. Speaking of Class, it may even surpass a General Class Demon's. It won't transcend a Demon Lord, of all things, but even so, there's no mistaking that it was a first-rate edible.

For the pitiful man kneeling before me, it must have been quite a trouble to obtain.

Normally, I would have devoured it without a second thought, but now it was futile. My feelings aren't moved.
Even the concept of hunger itself is starting to disappear across the horizon of my memory.
In the first place, once a Demon becomes a Demon Lord, they can go several years without food or drink. That's why there's probably no need to worry about death, and for someone like me, who went through such an intense sense of irritation just through a single day without food, this was definitely the strangest state I had ever found myself in.

In the end, I couldn't work up the intention to eat it no matter what, and without staining the end of the fork at all, I left it on the table.

"… No, I'm good."

"… Eh? You haven't even touched it, haven't…"

"… You can eat it if you want."

Ah……

This isn't me. This definitely isn't my character. Just how am I supposed to face my subordinates waiting for me in the world beyond!?
Normally, the food, and the plate, and the silverware, and the Demon that made it all would have been in my stomach by now. I'm the freaking Devourer, dammit!

I dismounted the chair, and passed by the Demon staring at me in a daze.
And without eating a single thing in the end, I left the store.

At the entrance, a needlessly wary Greed-kun was waiting for me.
Oh, he wasn't Greed-kun, was he… right, Deije.
Deije Breindac. Former general of Leigie Slaughterdoll's army.
Well, at the point, he's just a lone Demon searching for treasure in foreign lands, it seems.

Fufu, that's what you call unemployed, you know. Unemployed.

"… Oy, oy, so you've seriously lost your cravings…"

"Yeah. That's what I've been trying to tell you."

Cleanly gone. Nothing left. All that remained in me was a deep feeling of loss.
I had no clue of the means I needed to fill that. There's nothing I'm capable of

besides eating.

Deije-kun knitted his brow into a difficult expression, and folded his arms.

"… I've never heard of something like that…"

"Yeah, that's because I'm the first."

Even if he's long lived, at the very least, he's probably younger than me.
Well, for the individual that lost their longings, it definitely wouldn't be a fun thing to speak of, and even if such a case came up in the past, there's a possibility it never spread too far.

If I took away the point of looking at Deije-kun as an ingredient, he was a rare find among Demons, an 'accomplished individual.'
Usually, the deeper a Demon's desire runs, the harder it is to hold a conversation with them. In that sense, with his shallow desire, he may still be a novice of a Demon, but as a travelling companion, he wasn't half bad.

In contrast to his monster-like appearance, he was quite straight-forward. That man.
Well, that's something I was even able to notice when I fought him a year prior.

"Well, that's how it is, so the current me doesn't have the willpower to eat you."

"Ki ki ki, that so?I get the feeling it's nice and peaceful that way…"

Seeing him let out quite a deep sigh gave me the impression he was quite the pessimist.
It's not good to overthink things, you know. If you're going to think so hard about something make it thoughts towards how you plan to satisfy your own desire.

Thinking of something, I tried asking him.

"… You, could it be that you usurped my appetite?"

"Wha… like hell I did. Even if you begged me, I wouldn't want to take it."

Well, that's about right.
The target of his theft I likely treasure. You can call that the most popular type of Greed.
In the first place, I doubt someone who wanted something like my appetite would ever become an Avaritia. If there was a Demon like that, they would definitely come to govern Gula instead.

Deije-kun's disgusted face was the real deal. Fufu, you don't have to hate it that much…

Deije-kun, and that Zeta-kun fellow seemed to be suffering quite a bit, but once you become a Demon Lord, this level of heat isn't enough to influence you in the slightest.
Regardless of having eaten that Angel, after confirming that not a particle of my hunger had retrned, I lowered myself into a seat at the café.
Of course, it wasn't the one I had collapsed at before. That shop was destroyed from the shockwaves of the Angels' attacks.
The shop chosen to grace our reunion was somewhat newer than that other one, but there wasn't much a difference between them. It was that sort of small diner.

Perhaps because it was a ways away from the battlefield, the air was calm as if that scene from before had been but a dream.
It was enough to make one sleepy.

With Deije-kun sitting across, and Zeta-kun positioned to watch my every move, I conversed. They didn't seem to intend to hide anything, and they smoothly explained the current state of affairs.

It looks like the Demon World's state had changed greatly in the time I'd been gone.

It was right of me to set out for the Crimson Prison. My name was likely spread across the lands. As the foolish Demon Lord who tried to pull a bow at Kanon-sama.
That's why meeting someone who knew my face like Deije-kun was a form of luck. Yep, I must be in luck. It's not like we've become comrades in arms or anything, but there are plenty of Demon out there who won't listen to what you have to say.
Also, when I'm left alone, that feeling of loss wins over, and brings a hinderance to my daily function, so in that sense, this moderate level of tension isn't bad.

Angels and Valkyries.
Leigie's demotion in rank, and of how Heard Lauder became a Demon Lord.

These old tales were all fresh news to me.

Of all else, Leigie's fall didn't settle right. I wonder what happened.
At the very least, the achievement of bringing ruin to me should count towards his promotion, and not the opposite.
The fact that the Ancient Demon who moved the army under his name, Heard Lauder, became a Demon Lord makes the possibility that Heard Overruled Leigie to be the most likely option, but…

Whatever the case, it looks like my death was the starting point of something.
A Pride Demon, and me of Gluttony don't have too good of an affinity. They're not an enemy I'd like to fight, but… if my annihilation started up something, then if my survival was found out, I got the feeling he would come for me. It was quite a pain.

But putting me aside, the two Greed-kuns were focusing on the former.

Future over past. Well, it's not like I don't see where they're coming from. The problem with Leigie was mine alone, and Deije-kun was irrelevant.

While Deije-kun had become quite affable, Zeta-kun continued to send suspicious eyes in my direction, so I decided to just play along.

"Hmm… Angels, is it? I guess blue moons really do rise."

"What's more, Saint Lord Class. Ki ki ki, there's definitely something up."

As he said that, Deije-kun's eyes sparkled with desire as if he were staring at his prey.
It was common knowledge that Angels occasionally descended, but that was in low frequency, and those with over a set level of competence wouldn't think of coming down.
For Saint Lord class, if you exclude the War of Black and White ten thousand years ago, it was a story I hadn't heard at all as of late.

Deije-kun's words were quite on the mark.

… But that's all they were.

It feels bad to dampen the flame on Deije-kun's earnest desire, but this isn't that sort of story. This won't be the path to his glory.
From my point of view, it was all too clear, but a General has a General's point of view, and a Lord, a Lord's.

"Fufu… Deije-kun, you're reading too much into it. Fufu… if you want Glory, then stop chasing around something like Angels, and start aiming to become a Demon Lord already."

That was the first crossroad.
For a Demon who can't even do that, there's no glory to be found.
And chasing Angels is a waste of time. Honing the mind and body on the path to become a Demon Lord isn't something done in order to destroy angels and Demons.

It's all about seeing the depths of your desire. That's all there is to it.

It's another matter when battle is directly related to said desire, but your Sin isn't something like that, right?
Fufu, this is what they call escapism, isn't it?

Deije frowned, and regretfully shook his head.

"Ki ki ki, reaching that level isn't something I can imagine for myself. I'll just take it as it comes."

Fufu… do what you will.
Of course, even if it be to friendly troops, any Avaritia willing to lend out the target of their longings (treasures) will never become a Demon Lord, you know…

Right, his sin is… too shallow. I know of a greed that burns much more brightly.
For Deije-kun who chose to toss away his treasure, of all things, it may be a matter of pure nature, but this is quite severe.

Zeta-kun asked Deije-kun a question. It looked like they were partners, and had a sort of teacher-student relationship.
The young boy Demon's expression did indeed hold the color of trust towards him.

"So, Deije-san. What should we do? We ended up letting one of them get away…"

"… Now that a Lord's in the mix, we can't go on at this rate. I did plan to give chase, but at that level, to be honest, it's beyond my hands."

Our natural enemy, the Angels.
And the difference of Rank.

Deije-kun's words were correct. Depending on the situation, Avaritia could exhibit unrivalled strength, but in pure fighting power, it fell a step behind Ira and Gula.
If he had that Demon Blade from before, I'll bet he'd be able to put up a decent fight with a Saint Lord of that level, though.
That thing was all bark, and no bite.

"Ki ki ki, for now, let's at least write in a report to the Great Demon King… even

something of that level should give off a considerable reward."

Fufuf… how sweet. How very sweet. Having Lust Demons for sweetness is more than enough.
Sweeetness and firmness. He's pushing too hard on the brakes. There are times when wiles fall short of bravery. That was a phenomenon that we age old demons rarely come to witness.

Kanon-sama was a Lord that governed Wrath, yet also a kind-hearted King.
That's why, even even with a simple report, there would likely be a bit of a reward. But Deije-kun, if you keep at it like that, then what you seek will never fall into your hands.

"So, Zebul. What do you plan on doing?"

"… Well then, that's a good question."

The Angel wasn't tasty at all, but still, there was something to be gained.
My physical condition isn't bad… No, the truth's that I understand I'm at peak condition. The current me could probably even put up a more decent fight with that Leigie. Once more, I'll get some experience fighting that Lord of Sloth. I won't be crushed so easily this time around.

Of all else, the current me doesn't taste anything no matter what I try to eat. That's why perhaps I'll be able to eat him this time around. Fight poison with poison… I wonder if that's what you'd call it.
It's the life I've gotten together again, so challenging him again doesn't sound bad. I'm a challenger… fufufu, when I think of it that way, my heart dances just a bit.

Perhaps sensing something from my expression, Deije opened just one of his six eyes, and asked.

"Zebul, won't you come with me? In the past, we were mutual enemies, but that's exactly why I can understand your strength. Ki ki ki, taking on Angels instead of Demons isn't a bad change of pace, once in a while, right?"

"Fu… I'll have to decline."

His proposal was a respectable one, even shocking to hear from a Demon. Inviting along one who once terrorized me in the past isn't something I could imagine.
But even if I'd lost my cravings, I had my dignity as a former Demon. Also, the merits of answering to his invite were too low.
An Angel's taste held too little value to me.

"Why?"

"Fufufu… I have a need to go and meet… eat up that Leigie."

That was my obligation as a challenger to one who'd bested me once before.
Deije-kun distorted his face a little, and directed a gaze as if he were looking at a monster in my direction.

"… Just where do you find such energy after you were thoroughly destroyed like that…"

"That's obvious… if I go on without eating, I can't call myself a Gula anymore."

Even if I'm not hungry at all. I doubt you'd understand it.
This is a matter of pride.

"… Well, well, well, I guess all of those Demon Lords out there are a bit off their rockers."

"And that's exactly why they're all tasty."

"Deije-san… is this person alright in the head?"

Zeta-kun's face was quite clearly stiffened as he pointed at me.

What a rude child.
Well, I didn't expect him to understand my train of thought anyways. This is mine, and mine alone.
Fufu… even if you may be Greed, I won't let you take it from me so easily.

"… So you'll be off to the Dark Prison, then… Ki ki ki, the ownership of that land has already shifted. Heard Lauder's a tough one, you know? I mean, that there's a Superbia who's followed Boss Leigie from time immemorial. He's even the Rank One Demon Lord at the moment. While you may be the Devourer, it's too heavy a burden."

"Fufu."

You really don't get it.
Yes, your words are all correct.
As it is, Pride grows stronger the more years pass by. If that gets to around the same level of time as Leigie's existence, then no normal Demon Lord would be able to lay a finger on them. Ranks aren't just some decoration, and as Gluttony, my affinity against him is bad.

… But that's not enough of a reason for me not to eat.

Fufu… Rank One's Pride.
Heard Lauder. It's unfortunate that I won't be able to partake in your matured taste.
But there's no helping it. You may be a bit heavy for an appetizer, but I'll eat you up all the same.

"… Keh, looks like you've no mind to change your intentions."

"Could it be you're making light of me, Deije-kun? Fufu… even like this, I'm a former Demon Lord, you know."

"No, of course, I know that, but…"

Deije let out a dissatisfied sigh.
It was likely his own shallow desire that prevented him from empathizing with me.
The two of us were different lifeforms. The souls that formed our base, and our ranks were different. My power was higher class even among the other Demon Lords, and no matter how strong Deije-kun became, no matter how many Demon Blades he held, that gap was close to absolute.

I wonder if he's noticed it.

That in the eyes he used to look at me, there was a slight color of awe mixed in.

"Yep… each and every one of you Lords is just too hard to deal with. There's no helping it. I'll just do as I wish, them."

"And I don't plan on stopping you. Carry out your cravings as you please. Fufufu… make sure you don't regret it when they're all gone."

"I can't even imagine these feelings in me going out. Ki ki ki, from my eyes, Zebul the Devourer… I can't see that yours has gone out either."

As me muttered that with exaggeration, he raised a peculiar laugh.

His eyes, and his voice didn't give me the impression he was joking around.
Well, desire is something you keep within yourself. Only their possessors can truly grasp their natures.
As it to answer to that, I licked my lips.

After trembling a little, Deije-kun got up. He had a goal of his own. I had neither the right, nor the motivation to stop him.

"So will you be departing any time soon? From here on plan on heading for the Palace of Rending Flames as soon as I can."

"Fufu… perhaps I'll go meet an old friend first. Stopping to talk once in a while isn't a bad thing."

In the first place, it was a coincidence I chose to set foot in the Crimson Prison.
I came here without any detours, so I hadn't even heard the slightest rumor an Angel had come down, and I never even imagined I would see someone I knew.
But when It came down to it, I met the Angels, and I met Deije-kun. It may be off from my goal, but while I'm at it, another meeting or two doesn't sound bad.

Humans sure are interesting creatures… no, I'm pretty sure I mean Demons.

"An old… friend?"

"Yeah… I've been alive for a while… even if I look like this, I've been around quite a bit."

Of course, a majority of those acquaintances have taken up residence in my stomach…
If you look at it from the other side, you can think of the one I was off to meet as one of the rare acquaintances I had that didn't settle down there.
There's also the fact I couldn't eat him because we were part of the same army under the Great Demon King, but the greater reason lay with that Demon's power.

Fufufu…

Well, it's not like we got along anyways. We're comrades in longevity, so there's that sympathy thing or another.
Suspecting something, Deije-kun opened his six exes, and stared hard enough to bore a hole in my face.

"Oy, oy, you couldn't mean…"

"Fufufu… well, we're friends… after all."

"… That's news to me."

It was a somber voice as heavy as lead.
As if smacked by that voice, Deije-kun and Zeta-kun took large leaps back. I had noticed it all along, so I wasn't surprised, but that presence surely was fearsome.
Strong enough that even with General Class power, you wouldn't have been able to perceive it.

If I didn't have my Abyss Zone, it was so thin that even I might have lost sight of it, and that inherently tremendous existence, was one of a rare Demon who didn't show off a single piece of the power he had stored up from times beyond memory.

That was the base of the Pride this Demon governed.

Zeta-kun looked up at his large frame with a stiff expression.

"W-what… you.. from when…"

"… Tsk."

He was about two heads over Deije-kun, making one think he was one of the『Greip Giants』that once inhabited this Demon world.
His protruding muscles were built like stone, and they covered his entire body like armor. The gap between his dignity and his light presence left one with and absurdly ominous sensation.

Vanity Seidthroan.

A Demon Lord who gave up on the throne.

He was quite a rude one whose first sounds directed at me were the click of his tongue. The great Lord of Demons boasting the moniker of The Egoist, used his thunderous voice that reverberated through the skies to throw out some lamentations.

"Why are you alive… that Slothful Lord… didn't destroy you… perfectly enough."

"Fufu… how rude a fellow. For those to be the words of our long-awaited reunion."

Along with an overflowing smile, deep despair started sputtering around me like sparks.

As I thought… isn't no good.

Part 4: Seconds Please

Before I knew it, the store was surrounded by countless soldiers. Just like Vanity, their presences were faint, and the sense of reality of the situation was compromised.

Deije-kun's face tensed, as he surveyed the area without a hint of negligence. His bearing was high strung, but there wasn't any fear.

Men and women of all ages. Their bodies, and powers, and sizes varied greatly, but in just one regard, did that Legion have a trait that put it apart from the armies of other Demon Lords.

Without any divide among their movements, they all fixed their eyes on me.
Let along an expression, their entire faces were enveloped in full masks of the darkest black.

They somewhat resembled the subordinates of Vanity when I first met him, but they were also somewhat different.

Vanity the Egoist's subordinates were a peculiar unit known as the Ravus Persona.

Their origin, or reason, nothing about them was known.
It wasn't for their strength, but for their ominous appearance that their names were spread. An incomprehensible army.
If we were looking at strength here, then Leigie's army that Deije-kun once commanded would far outclass them. As long as Vanity wasn't with them, that is.
But still, even without their Lord, this army had something I couldn't put my finger on.

"Fufu… that's quite a greeting…"

"Caution is… natural… no?"

Vanity came to his own conclusion, as he look down at me from a level far above my stature.
That goes without saying. I'm Gula. I'm used to putting people on their guard.

With their faces covered, the silent Demons weren't letting out any intent to harm me, and they merely looked on, as if awaiting orders from their master.
Loyalty. That quality that was exceedingly rare to find in a Demon was even rarer to come across in these numbers.

Fufu… well, I got used to it from past experience.
As if looking upon a detestable object, Vanity's deep and dark eyes full of longings lorded over me.

"Zebul… damn devourer."

"You're scaring me… fufufu, I'd prefer if you didn't glare at me that much."

Those aren't… the eyes you direct at an old friend, you know. I mean, I just tried taking a bit of a taste, didn't I?
No matter how many tens of thousands of years pass, he's a narrow-minded man…
And as always, the number of words he let out were few in numbers. It was apparently a habit he picked up in his childhood, and he couldn't grow out of it.
What was the saying for this again…
The child is the father of the man. Right, that's the one.

Without even trying to hide his disgust, Vanity raised a boorish voice.

"Why, here?"

"That one's… a coincidence, I assure you. Fufu, though I did make a stop here in

order to meet with you.”

“…So I took… the bait.”

The Crimson Prison was Vanity’s kingdom.
Entering it was one thing, but with a Lord like me coming in, there’s no way Vanity didn’t notice it.

As if trying to fill in the space between Vanity’s eyes and mine, Deije-kun opened his mouth.
Your guts alone are to be commended… Deije-kun.

“Ki ki ki, and so, why in the world have you decided to show up at this point in time, Boss Vanity?”

“… That, there.”

Vanity used his chin to point me out. As I thought, no matter how many years go by, he’s a rude one.
Finding satisfaction in that answer, Deije-kun nodded. I’d like to complain a little to that one.

“… You plan… on eating… more Angels?”

“… You sure bring up some nostalgic stuff.”

Yes, in the past, I was the Gula who devoured angels, and left nothing behind.
While they may be the natural enemy of Demons, no fault lay with them as ingredients. I have no discrimination among food. Apart from Leigie.
That’s why the Gula who ate the most Angels ten thousand years ago was likely me.

But of course, my goal this time wasn’t anything like that.
As the look of suspicion towards me rose, I spoke up to the man looking over me with an apologetic tone.

“But this time’s goal is irrelevant to that. Fufu… Vanity. I have some business with Leigie.”

“… Revenge… huh.”

A prideful thought. That sort must always have thoughts of violence.

“I’ve no interest in revenge. It’s because I can’t even eat him. Fufu… this time, I just what to have a little talk. With the Lazy King, that is.”

Yes. Those are my true intentions.
If it’s that man, who took inactivity to its extremes, then perhaps he would be able to offer an explanation to my current state.
No, even if he can’t… there’s no doubt that man killed the Demon Lord in me. In order to restore my desires once mre, it’s a score I have to settle.
Even if I’m only to face defeat again.

Vanity easily, and calmly nodded to my words.

“That… so? Do what… you want.”

"… Oy, oy, Boss Vanity, you sure about that? The Devourer, Zebul Glaucus, is the Demon Lord who pulled her sword on the Great Demon King, right? Ki ki ki, you sure you don't have to clean up the matter?"

You sure say some unnecessary things. Unnecessary as it may be.
Vanity was definitely a subordinate of the Great Demon King, but he definitely wasn't her loyal servant.
In the first place, Demons are self-serving. Direct orders from the King aside, there's no rule saying that two Demon Lords who meet by chance have to break into a fight.

As I've had an unnervingly long relation with him, I can say it for sure.
Even if he'd given up on the throne, if you were to split the Demon Lords allied to Kanon-sama into factions, he would definitely be on the anti-Kanon faction.

"… Don't… die… too quickly."

"Fufufu… is this where I'm supposed to give my thanks? Then thank you?"

"… fu."

Vanity snorted, before readily showing his back, and walking off.
And as if they were a receding wave on the shore, his subordinates filtered out of the store.

It was like I had been seeing a dream, and after that, the situation was exactly the same as it had been before.
Vanity was only here for a brief instant. His presence wasn't anywhere close at this point. Using my zone, I was just barely able to make him out before, but now it had faded into the mist.

Deije-kun's stiff face let out a sigh.

"Just what… was that? He sure is an ominous one. My instincts were sending shocks of fear all over my body… Ki ki ki, the world sure is wide. I didn't think it was like this last I saw it… "

"… That's because Vanity was preparing for war. Fufu… it just means he wasn't as calm as his expression would indicate."

From times past, that man's been a coward. To his sin of Superbia, he held a crippling trauma.
That's why he's so timid, and that's why he's so strong.

I hadn't seen him in a while, but it looks like Vanity hadn't changed in the slightest. No, just a little, just by a small margin, he had become more resolved.
Fufufu… Heard Lauder must have stepped on a nerve.

Zeta-kun tilted his head, and posed a question to Deije-kun, who had regained his composition.

"… But why did he even come all the way here…? Even taking his army with him."

"He likely came to hammer me down… fufufu, it's because I know him quite well."

Probably, Kanon-sama included, he was the Demon Lord I've known for the longest

amount of time.
For Demons who I've known of that long, there's probably only that Leigie to contest. Also, perhaps I knew of Heard Lauder, or not.

"… Hammer?"

"Right. Hammer. I won't get in your way, so you don't go getting up in my business. That sort of thing."

The killing intent flowing out from Vanity was definitely directed at me. To try threatening someone who, for argument's sake, reigns over Gluttony like me, I can only show some admiration.
Fufu… just as meeting Leigie was my current supreme goal, Vanity must have something as well.
Well, I do have a general idea, but of course, I'm not going to do anything about it, and it'll probably come to a result convenient to me anyways.

Right now, eating was nothing but a pain. It would be best if there were fewer hindrances.

Misunderstanding something, Deije-kun tensed his face, and let his gaze float out in space.

"Even so, that imposing air wasn't normal… does that Vanity have some sort of karma with Angels? It did seem he had taken quite a bit of caution regarding them, but…"

Karma. Karma, is it?
Deije-kun was half on the mark, and half off.
If you ask whether he has some or not, then that's probably a yes right there. Among long-lived Demons, I doubt you'd find too many without any karma against those heavenly guys.

"Fufu, Deije-kun. That Demon is…"

Should I say it, or not?
Hmm… I hesitated for a moment, but it's not like any problems would arise just by saying it.
I wanted to put on airs for a bit, so I decided to teach little old Deije-kun.

"… a former『Angel』, you know?"

Angels and Demons are two sides of the same coin. We're all made of soul all the same, and the differences between us lied only in if we're trash, or righteous souls.
That's why, if an Angel falls, their spirits can turn over, and they'll become Demons.

"… So he's Fallen…"

Right. An Angel falls to a Demon. A『Fallen Angel』.
A reversed Angel. An angry soul, betrayed by the love of god. Fufufu, in the first place, he's much more sinful than I, back when I was still a Demon.

Even upon hearing my words, Deije-kun was more collected than I expected. Fufu, despite everything, it seems he really has been through a considerable amount of life.
He whispered to himself, to confirm the meaning of his words. Half of it may have been to let Zeta-kun follow the conversation, as the lad was looking up a Deije-kun

with an uncomprehensive face.

"Ki ki ki, a former Angel… is it? That sure ain't anything nice."

"Well… that's right. Fufu, he's still quite bitter about it."

Nothing nice. It's because he wasn't nice that he fell in the first place. Well, that's right, I guess.
But why is it that Vanity currently holds the seat of a Demon Lord? An absolute existence among the ranks of Demons?
This is why humans are so interesting… no, Demons, I mean.

"… So can Vanity win against those Angels?"

Deije-kun muttered, but as if he wasn't looking for an answer, he let his words dangle.

"Well, if it's just Angels, he'll probably win. But Vanity's enemy this time is no Angel."

"… Yeah. No ordinary Angel, a Saint Lord. What's more, those guys… they went and powered up in the middle of battle. If that wasn't something they had been concealing, and it really did rise right in the middle of battle, it's going to get troublesome."

Fufu… Deije-kun's quite the worrier.
But those worries are needless. At the very least, if it's an Angel on the level of the one I fought, it won't be an enemy for Vanity, and that wasn't even really a battle for me.
But I won't say that one.

Fufufu, what you should be worrying about is yourself, and I need to start worrying about myself as well.

I turned my thoughts back to me.
Me alone.

Now then, how should I go about getting to Leigie…
How should I set out…

It will be difficult to get passed Heard Lauder. That's just how Demons of Pride are.
They have absolute strength, but if I had to say, that power declined the most when faced upfront.
But when it was a battle of pursuit, they displayed peerless strength. That was the Original Sin of Superbia.

In the first place, will he even fight me?
Leigie's Castle of Shadows was deep in the land known as the Dark Prison.
No matter what direction I go at it from, I'll have to tread on the territory of Heard Lauder. Will he think of me as a harmless Demon?
No, I doubt it. My power's too strong for that, and even if I try to get through with words, he's kinda a battle maniac.

In that case, I'll have to make an opening.
If we face off, I don't think I'll lose, but it won't be an easy win.
Pride was generally an attribute that excelled in speed. At Demon Lord Level, they could see the world moving as if it were stagnant.

Since there's no way to break through by running, my best bet would be to wait for a good opportunity.

I don't really like leaving myself to fate, but luckily for me, it shouldn't be long before a large gap appears in Heard Lauder's defenses.

"Fufufu, an opportunity, is it? How many years has it been… since I did something like waiting for a chance…"

It usually works out one way or another if I muscle my way through it… for me.
This exhilarating feeling of waiting for something to come wasn't anything I've felt for a long, long time.

So what should I say at a time like this… fufu…

"Seconds… perhaps?"

"Hm? Did you say something?"

"Fufu… it's nothing."

I dodged Deije-kun's suspicious look, and stared out in the direction Vanity had departed.
Nice. That desire, that emotion, it's quite nice. Vanity the Egoist. From the eyes of someone who's known you so long, I can't even believe you were once an Angel.

Time and luck were on my side.
Fufufu, Leigie. I'll probably be meeting you in a foreseeable future. Have fun waiting for it.

Chapter 3: Acedia's Neglect

Part 1: Today was Peaceful

It was the reaches of space.

Space. According to some God out there or another, it was an endless abyss of darkness. Even if one possessed heavenly wings, it wasn't so easy to span the emptiness that was vaster than the high Heavens, and rumored to exist in a place somewhere far beyond them. And there, it was said that absolutely nothing existed.

Gravity and matter and light and even desire ceased to exist.
All that was there was… right.

"Nothing…"

"… It's not… nothing!"

An unthinkable amount of power came from those slender arms to pull at me, and from that dark, and warm, and soft space of nothingness, I was dragged out.
Lust generally wasn't suited to battle, but when love was concerned they did have a nature that raised their abilities quite a bit. Not that it really matters.

Beautiful golden hair, and deep blue eyes. Her innocent yet delicate features held an air that would knock any Demon that governed another original sin silent.

But at the same time, there wasn't anyone brazen enough to assault her on this land.

Lorna. No last.
A Luxuria Demon, as well as the Lord of Sloth's personal maid.

But that form I once yearned for, that way of life, none of them were enough to stimulate my desire in the slightest.

It's not like I Overruled her, or that I didn't even envy her anymore, or anything like that.
It all just became a pain. All of it. Perhaps this is a single form of enlightenment.

Between me and her, I was just a little shorter, but that was a difference in the range of experimental error. That's why when she grabbed me, and dragged me around, my feet still slid across the ground.
With strong will concealed in those blue eyes that seemed to suck me in, I offered a single word as always.

"… What?"

"… Why are you… in Leigie-sama's bed…"

'Twas my daily schedule. That's why I'm always so sleepy.
With my arms locked down by her, I let out a yawn. The corners of Lorna's lips twitched for a moment, but even that expression of hers was lovable.
This may be her natural gift thing… no, is it something that simply comes naturally to Luxuria Demons? I mean, those guys are always tempting others' carnal desires.

The darkness gradually seeping out of the deepest depths of my body.
Like Envy, it was hard to go against, but overwhelmingly more gentle, and nothing but kind. That force that was sinking my existence into depravity was something called drowsiness.
I wonder how much time has passed since the path of Sloth opened to me. Recently, I've become able to understand Leigie-sama's sentiment just ever-so-slightly.

I'm really sleepy. And sluggish.
Just as Envy continues to scorch, and Gluttony continues to hunger, the desire of Sloth forbade me from making any drastic movement.

"… Each and every day, just give it up already…"

"That's because you haven't given up on crawling in there each and every day!!"

As if her usual calm demeanor was but a lie, Lorna began prodding me with her broom.
And just as I've begun to understand Leigie-sama's feelings as of late, I've begun to understand Lorna as well.

It's not that she's kind. She's kind to Leigie-sama. She's spoiling him.
There was probably a small difference between the two.

She incessantly shakes up my shoulders.
But up to here's just our usual routine. Perhaps because of Sloth's power, even if she's shaking me like that, it barely gets through to me.

"Medea Luxeliaheart! Do your work properly!"

"… I'm a pillow."

It's not like working is a pain.
My duty is for me to sleep in Leigie-sama's bed. By sleep, I don't mean it in any strange way. I'm just trying to indicate pure and simple sleep.
In that sense, I'm fulfilling my professional duties more than all else.

As evidence, my Sloth Tree is proceeding forward at a reasonable rate.

"Then… what the hell is that under Leigie-sama's head!?"

"… My senpai."

Whether he was listening to our exchange or not, Leigie-sama had the back of his head rested against the pillow without moving a single bit.
The way he looked as if he were dead hadn't changed at all. But the power I could feel from him simply existing there was definitely that of a Lord.

Senpai. My senpai.
Handed down from the Great Demon King, Kanon Iralaude, he was a pillow crafted from the plumage of infant Fire Dragons. Of course, he didn't have a name. But having been made of Fire Dragon materials, the pillow was exceedingly durable, possessed ridiculously high fire resistance, and on top of being constantly warmed to a comfortable temperature, he boasted exquisite softness.

He was undoubtedly my greatest foe.

He was, but recently, I've found myself losing interest in mulling over something like that. In the first place, I never accepted it from the start.
Isn't it idiotic to envy a pillow? I've never heard of an Invidia like that.

The reason I still aim for that coveted position is simply because my instincts will me to.
… And it's not like I have anything better to do.

What's more, the greatest bedroom in the Castle of Shadows was undoubtedly the Demon Lord's bedroom. Just by being here, my power rises.
Lorna silently held a hand mirror up to me. And in it, I saw an expressionless Medea Luxeliaheart, without a trace of the abundant emotions I had before.

Truly expressionless…

"… And?"

"… Hah… Medea. Are you really fine with this?"

"Yes."

"… Hah…"

As I gave an immediate response, Lorna let out a deep sigh.
Her eyes weren't colored with wrath. They held only the colors of sorrow.
Lorna would never let an angry expression grace her face. Perhaps that was the nature of Lust, or perhaps she had gotten used to Leigie-sama's behavior, or perhaps it was because she was the one who saved me. I didn't know the reason.

She seemed to want to say something, but once more, she let out a deep, deep sigh, before speaking.

"At the very least, please wear some clothes… clothes…"

"… That's a pain."

In the first place, I'm barely ever going to leave the bed, so there's no point in wearing clothing, and when I did want to leave, there was only ever Lorna here, so there was no point in hiding anything.
Leigie-sama's here too, but I'll bet he doesn't even see me when I'm before his eyes, so the emotion of embarrassment before him had vanished at some point. Thinking about it was just a waste of time.
Without saying anything to my response, with a smile to indicate, 'Medea's drunk again,' she took a single Glance in Leigie-sama's direction.

"Leigie-sama… once I put Medea away, I will bring out your meal, so please wait a moment…"

"…"

Leigie's sleeping time has recently gotten even longer. He doesn't even make the slightest movements at Lorna's voice.
Nodding in satisfaction, Lorna quietly extended her arms towards me.

She inserted her hands into my armpits, and lifted me up. I didn't resist. This is also

but our daily routine.
Being lifted like this was quite a bizarre sensation. It literally felt like I was moving without my feet reaching the ground.
As she carried me away like I was a piece of luggage, I offered her a word.

"Lorna…"

"Yes?"

"I think it's best if you quit it with these pointless things."

No matter how many times you put me away, I'll return.
And as of late, it's a scene that's happened over and over again. As if through homing instinct, no matter how far away she would stow me, I would find myself here.
Even if it went against my Sloth, perhaps that was the remnants of the Envy left within me.
I can't calm down. I have to be here.

"Medea… you are a bad influence on Leigie-sama."

"… Bad… influence?"

Lorna likely offered blind devotion. She saw only what she wanted to see.
This is the Lord of Sloth who's lived an overwhelmingly long time, and you're saying I'm a bad influence… just what sort of dreams are you seeing of Leigie-sama?
There wasn't a window, but due to the countless candlesticks decorating the walls, the inside of the room was bright.
Oh, even if it was dark, with my night vision, I would be able to make out Lorna's expression regardless.

I thought for a moment, and tried asking.

"So should I wear clothes?"

"… That isn't the problem here."

Then what exactly is the problem?
Even if I didn't ask that, I could guess. If a Demon's cravings are the validation for their existence, then Lorna's being is the form of Luxuria.

But in this current situation, without envying me, without developing『Invidia』, she continued to embrace that, and in that sense, she was perhaps superior to me as a Demon.

She didn't answer anything more, as she draped a gray blanket around me, before lifting me up by the armpits again.
Without sound, she opened the door of Leigie'sama's room. The deepest chamber to which no Hero, or Angel had ever reached was, to the maid, and to the worthless Demon known as me, simply a portion of our everyday lives.

The army of Leigie of Sloth, that used to exist in such numbers, could now be counted on a single hand. The inside of the Castle of Shadows, constructed of black stone, was dreadfully quiet.
The powerful and famous army had largely been absorbed into the forced of a certain

Heard Lauder. No, that was probably Heard's army to begin with. That's why that was the natural result.

This castle was always much too vast.
Even compared to the Great Demon King's Palace of Rending Flames I had visited once before, its scale was off the charts. It could fit two or three of those cities around inside it with ease.

No, in truth, while this castle was a castle, it was just as much a town itself.

Not just subordinates, all of the subjects under the protection of the Lord of Sloth gathered at this stronghold. Of course, they lived apart, but that was also one characteristic of the Castle of Shadows.
Additions, and annexes added onto one another, and onto this bizarrely bloated Demon Lord estate. Inside, a countless number of Demons had their own properties, and it had already developed into a sort of labyrinth.

But all of that is already a story of the past.

"Now, Medea. We're here."

While I was nodding off, it seems we arrived. The place I found when I lifted my eyelids was my own room I had become accustom to. Without any decent garnishings, it was a very practical room.
Lorna's room was the one beside it. That wasn't always the case, but since I began carrying around Sloth, she altered her station. So she could deal with me easier.

My body was left on the bed, and Lorna hit her hands against each other as if she had just finished cleaning up.
How rude…

She tilted her head in thought, and murmured.

"Wouldn't just tying her to her bed be for the best…?"

"No use."

It was a pain, so I just gave two words.

Right, that won't work.
It's a given that Lorna's schemings will end in failure.
Even like this, I'm a General Class Demon. In just basic specs, I far surpassed the maid.
In this dog-eat-dog world, that simple truth was an absolute value.

With a wordless expression, Lorna looked at me.

"Then just… work a little. Every day, you just keep sleeping in that bed…"

"…"

Then why not tell that to Leigie-sama?
In the first place, I am working. In my own sense of values, I'm continuing to pursue my desire. I mean, yeah, I haven't been fighting as of late, but it's not like fighting's all there is to life.

Just what is Lorna wishing of me?
That was the biggest mystery. Leigie-sama no longer has any territory besides this castle, and this structure was completely surrounded by Heard's domain.
Possessing a territory surrounded on all sides by allied forces was a trait that no one else but the Great Demon King boasted.
Meaning there isn't a single one to invade here.
Even if you think long and hard about it, I doubt there are many out there who could get past that Heard Lauder.

"Leigie-sama is fine. Because that's his job…"

"…"

Then what's different with me? No, Leigie-sama's sleeping time is rapidly growing in length. I spend about half a day asleep, but while I'm awake, the only time I ever see Leigie-sama awake is during his meal time. That meal is also fed to him by Lorna, so I can't even say with certainty that he's awake at those times.

I'm quite gone case, but Leigie-sama's on another level.
That great divide was something I could only look to in respect. Just what can I do to sleep for such a long time…

When looked at from afar, Leigie-sama was quite bad, but when observed up closely, he was even worse, and even greater than that, was Lorna's habit of taking everything in a favorable light. I don't know what's going on anymore.

And all was at peace at the Castle of Shadows.

Part 2: Honestly, it's Troubling

I'm bored.
Demons of Sloth are bored. Their cravings don't require any stimulus from the outside world.
No stimulus means their bodies, and their hearts give no reactions. They can't.
To summarize, one with Sloth at his base aside, for a half-assed one with other longings within me, it was quite an unbearable sensation.

This must be why there aren't any out there that reach the extremes of their power through simple sleep.
Boredom was the slayer of Sloth.

I remembered back when there was a Sloth Demon among my subordinates. He was an exceedingly weak Demon, but that stands to reason. The more they move, the more Sloth's power declines. Being enlisted in the army pretty much means there was no helping his powers dropping to such a low level.
He didn't lose the use of his Skills, but the greater problem was that his base abilities were much too low. As a soldier, it was a fatal error.

On top of that, Sloth Skills weren't even used for offense.

Every kind of resistance imaginable, VIT elevation, and other defensive Skills, as well,

as some passives to let one live life without having to eat, and some passives to prevent one's body from getting dirty, and some passives to make excretion unnecessary, and… anyways, there was an absurd amount of passives. Passive perfectly describes a Demon of Sloth, but no matter how you look at it, that's an invitation to death's door.

That's why there's no reason to embrace it, or a reason to forge it. For what purpose did Leigie-sama continue to push on with it, I didn't understand even a fragment of his thought process.
But at the very least, I'm quite certain that the other Demon Lords proceed down their paths at a rate that leaves Sloth back in the dust.

And… I'm bored.

By doing nothing but wriggling around in the mattress like this, I end up recalling unnecessary things. I'm starting to feel a sense of inferiority.
Like, am I really alright with it like this?
Without finding victory, some hazy, cloud-like thing was wandering around the depths of my heart.

What's useful at times like these are my Invidia Skills.

Envy.

It was the most common Original Sin embraced by the Demons of the Demon world.
The heart to find jealousy in others was to Demon, and Humans, something anyone had felt at least once in their lives.

Fortune, and tragedy, and talent, and power, and treasure, and fame.

Even in this desolate world, there was an abundance of targets to envy.
It was the complete opposite sin to Pride, and its versatility of use was something not found within the other Skill Trees.

Well, I put a lot out there, but to say it simply… it's optimum for killing time.
While lying face up on the bed in my room, I activated a Skill.

"Envy Vision"

My field of vision frothed over in an instant, and changed.
It's a Skill to observe those you've Envied. Based on time and place, this was an evasive Skill that could display considerable power. It could only target the targets of your Envy, and that restriction was quite a fault, but for the current me, it didn't really matter who I saw, so there wasn't really a problem.

First, the General who once served under the same banner of Leigie's Legion, an Avaritia Demon, The Usurper, Deije Breindac. Let's peep at him.
It's been a bit since Deije left, but I get the feeling it hasn't been too long either. While it may be one sided, I can frequently view his form.

Without taking up a position in another army, after he resigned, Deije had been wandering here and there across the lands.
There are few of General Class. That's why regardless of what army he takes up service in, he should receive a favorable reception. Despite that, without taking up

any official duty, he sought the fulfillment of his longings, walking through foreign lands. Of his way of life, I was a little jealous.

It seems he even got himself a tag-along. A Demon about as young as me. One with ashen hair and eyes.
Comparing his slender body to Deije's was like equating a woodchip to a tree, but the power I sensed from his body was definitely nothing so small.

"… How nice."

Compared to that, how about me?
How many months has it been since I last tasted the outside air? I can barely even remember it.
Since attaining Sloth, I've just done nothing but lie atop the bet, and spent my time lazing around.
If you ask about my growth, I am growing, so I can't really say anything about it, but that growth was limited to my power as a Demon, and other than that, nothing had changed at all.

Thinking too deep about it would lower my spirits, so I changed my train of thoughts.
I craned my ears to Deije's and that tag-along who seemed to be called Zeta's conversation.

"… Angel."

I'd never really met one before, but I've heard the rumors. That name belonged to the natural enemy of Demons, who lived atop the heavens, and the polar opposite existence to Demons.
The war that broke out around ten thousand years ago birthed considerable casualties on both sides, apparently, and the older Demons rarely ever talk about it.

Recently, the fact that more heavenly assassins had been descending had become the topic of gossip, and I'd listened in to that.

It appears that Deije is pursuing them. I don't know the reason, and even if I heard it, I doubt I'd understand. Deije's desire was stronger than mine, it's probably something like that.

If he's telling the truth, then will that something that's going on in the Demon World make it's way all the way here?

… Yeah, probably not.

After thinking a little, I ended up answering my own question.
Leigie-sama is strong. He doesn't move in the slightest, yet he's overwhelmingly strong
Even if that something were to aim for his neck, they'll give up soon enough. They'll understand the complete lack of meaning in such a deed, and how their power would never amount to enough.

I changed my posture, and pushed my face into my pillow.
Despite what she says, Lorna cleans my room as well, so there's no obstacles to my slacking.

Without shifting my body, I changed over to the next target.

What entered my eyes was the form of a single girl with teary eyes, and grit teeth, looking over in my direction.
She was trying to form a smile at her mouth, but even a moment's glance could tell you how cramped her face was.

Her form could be described as a little younger version of Lorna, with her breasts quite a bit withered. She definitely had an attractive face and figure to an extent.
The name of the girl who, if you wiped away the smile full of ill intent constantly covering her face, would look identical to Lorna, was Hiero.

Lorna's younger sister, and the Demon who's set to look after Leigie once Lorna is gone.

But she wasn't the target of my Envy.

My target was the one calmly standing at Hiero's side.
Like Leigie, the Demon boasted black eyes and hair, as if they were fashioned of darkness.
But the air about him was the opposite of the lazy Lord.
The Demon whose mere existence constantly exerted an aura that forced all creation to their knees was a Demon Lord who governed Superbia.

At the same time, he was once my superior, and upon becoming a Lord, he easily crumbled the ranking system, and took over the Rank One position among Demon Lords.

The Prideful Kaiser, Heard Lauder.
At this point, he was a Lord of Pride that no one didn't know of, and with his condescending eyes pinned on Hiero, he raised his arm to the horizontal.

Towards an area of empty space, he lightly lowered that arm.

… And with just that, the ground split.

Without using a Skill, the pressure from that single attack had torn the ground asunder. The earth quivered as if choked with tears, as black pebbles rolled across the ground.
But with a single word from Heard, all of them fell flat on the earth.

Heard used his chin to indicate the natural disaster he had personally brought about. Even during that motion, his glare continued to pierce through Hiero.
With a dejected expression, the girl pointed to herself, as she tilted her head in a planned-out cute gesture.

Heard completely ignored that flirtation, and gave a single order.

『Do it.』

"Pu… Nonono, that's impossible."

I unintentionally let out a laugh.
Just what does Heard Lauder think Hiero is?
She's an ordinary person without even any military service behind her. For a civilian,

she may be considered strong, but that's all she was as a Demon of Pride.
I won't say she doesn't have any talent. Her garbage-like nature was exceedingly aligned with that of a Demon, and given the time, she would probably become strong.

But now is definitely not the time.

More so, to split the land barehanded without using a Skill, just who are you…?
I don't even think most Demon Lords would be able to manage that one.
That was the farthest front only a Pride Demon who had continued to hone his body could reach.

I had heard of how Heard had dragged Hiero off from Lorna.
Perhaps he felt something from a fellow Pride Demon, but it seems she was persevering in being beaten into shape.

No, she was persevering, but… yep. My condolences.
That's impossible, ain't it?
In the first place, the thickness of Heard's and her arms are completely different. While it's true a Demon's strength and appearance are disproportional, there's something out there called limitsHiero was just as delicate a Lorna. Her power was likely not something she polished to use in battle.

『N-no… impossible. That's impossible for me…』

『Do it.』

『No, I mean, my power is…』

『Do it.』

『……』

On the other side of things, it doesn't look like Heard has any intentions of listening to Hiero's words. Well, that's to be expected from a Pride Demon, but…
Hiero lowered her eyes from Heard's, and with tears of defeat forming at their corners, she slowly lifted her hand.

I couldn't handle the scene any longer, and returned my vision to my own.
On top of the bed. The complete opposite of the wasteland Hiero had stood on, lying idly in my world of repose. I stretched my body.
I recalled the scenes I just witnessed, did some calculations, and as no one was around me, I shook my head.

"No, no… that's impossible…"

I really wonder what Heard is thinking… that was… too much. Even for me, it's absolutely imposible.
I remember of how, with a gentle smile on her face, Lorna had told me of how Heard had taken Hiero away for training. I wonder if she hates her sister… no, that's definitely wrong. Despite this and that, when Leigie-sama isn't concerned, she's a woman of common sense.

But that being the case, that scene back there was… just harassment. She'll fold over before anything actually gets trained.
And wait, what about her household skills… I was kinda under the impression she

was going to take up duty after Lorna…
It looks like the intent has completely shifted,…

This is kinda tiring…
I sighed, but I still went on to use the Skill for my next target.

My field of vision shifted for a third time. This time, it was for the kind older sister.

The form of a maid walking down a familiar corridor came to my eyes.
Even when no one was watching, she held a posture brimming with courtesy, and even when she was doing nothing but walking, that figure made for a pretty picture. She wore a clean white apron over a navy blue one piece. On top of focusing on practicality, the attire made her seem all the more lovable.

Her form was prim and proper, and while I can't say for certain, she didn't look suited to one carrying the sin of Luxuria.

But I know. Right, under that naively oblivious expression, I know just how muddy of an appetite lies. Her well-calculated passions let her raise her status as a Demon without letting a single thing taint her body.

Honestly, she was the one I was most afraid of.
In the past, I once chanced upon a meeting with the Demon Lord of Lust, Lilith Luxeliaheart, and by Envying a part of her, I could understand.
The Original sin of Luxuria didn't possess any direct offensive Skills like Pride or Gluttony, but it definitely wasn't weak. Its way of life was, in a sense, close to Sloth.

But if Acedia was like a plant, then Luxuria was a carnivorous plant. For them, the battlefield wasn't some bloodstained wasteland, but a… stained bedroom. Their battles were not the swinging of fists, but to burst in full bloom.
In that, there was a melting fear that had built up in me without my notice. And Luxeliaheart, the Demon Lord one, was a powerful Lord who brought a number of other Demon Lords to their deaths.

It was, in a sense, the most dreaded power for a soldier.

I returned my eyes, and under the covers, I let my body shake in a fear that came from the depths of my heart as I whispered.

"… Lorna… what a frightening woman…"

"… And what do you mean by that…?"

"…!?"

I pulled off the blanket covering me. There, was the maid I had been peeping at, and fantasizing of.
The fact that I got lost in thought, and stopped watching, had backfired on me.

The perplexed face that she made— under that mask, I felt as if I were being tasted by the extended tongue of a snake, and on that illusion, I raised a short scream.

"How rude…"

"Kku… h-ha… hah…"

It became hard to breath for a moment, but I somehow got myself in order. It would be no joke if I choked to death atop the mattress.
And despite all that… Lorna still takes care of my meals, and cleaning. That's why it was unavoidable for her to be here.
A Demon of Sloth has no right to refuse. I mean, we aren't even doing anything to earn it.

"Now, Medea. It's time for your meal…"

"Y… yes…"

Hunger hasn't struck me yet. It's because it has been abated with my Skills. If I continued advancing down this tree, then perhaps food will become unnecessary in itself. For the reason of it being a pain, most likely.

But there's no way I'm getting there any time soon, and even once I've reached that point, I'd still probably eat meals. It would be difficult crushing such a necessary habit.
I press against my heart that was still exploding in my chest, and somehow raise my sluggish body before proceeding to the dining table that had been prepared.
Before coming here, I had never eaten a decent meal, so to me, Lorna's cooking was the taste of home.
Even without hunger, there's no way I would ever think it wasn't tasty.

Silently, Lorna stood by my side.
Without saying anything, she watched me bring the food to my mouth. If she stares at me so intently, I won't be able to make anything of the taste.
I finished eating, and as if she were gauging for the moment I put down my silverware, Lorna finally opened her mouth.

"… Hey, Medea."

"Yes?"

For a moment, I caught a glimpse of her hesitation. But that quickly vanished, and resolving herself, she threw a strong look in my direction.

"Don't you think it's about time you start working…"

"… Y-yes."

Those eyes were filled with such sorrow that my heart began to give off a throbbing pain.
What's with this mental assault… my Skills won't defend me from it…

Her voice was still untainted. There wasn't an emotion of Wrath or Pride behind them.
And that's why it was able to pierce through my heart like a blade.

"Medea, no matter how much you sleep, you'll never become Leigie-sama… you should have your own way to live out your life."

"… Y-yes…"

I… I feel like running away. Her earnesty was giving me this unbearable urge to flee. It was only amplified by the fact she was my life's benefactor.

And those words weren't getting at the root of things. It's not like I want to become Leigie-sama or anything… more so, I'm sure I don't want to do that.

What I want to be isn't the man, but the man's…

After thinking that far, I started going over the sins I carried once more.
… There's no way. I wonder if a screw went lose somewhere in my desire of Envy.

To add to it all, I've even begun to carry Sloth due to that, and it feels like I'm being closed in on from all sides.
If you carry multiple Sins, then each individual Skill becomes harder to raise. This is just a rumor, but its rate becomes even less than half. Because of that, it's hard for Demons of multiple Sins to get strong.
Also, how should I handle the pairing of Sloth and Envy…
And wait, in the first place…

"… This place doesn't even need an army anymore…"

Right. Leigie-sama's camp no longer has a need for bloodshed. There's no enemies, and no army. If you had to say, I was the sole member of the army.
If you tell me to work at a place like this, it's honestly troubling.

Right. It's not that I don't want to work. I don't have a place to work.

"It's fine."

And to me, Lorna directed a smile like the Virgin Mary, and said something befitting a Demon.

"I'll try getting Heard's Army to let you assist their work, so…"

"I'm sleeping. Good night."

"Wai…"

I ignored Lorna's cries, and dug myself into the bed.
Perhaps the one most messed up in the head is Lorna. She doesn't think of a single thing but Leigie-sama.

What floated up in my head was the form of the one I had peeped at a while ago, Hiero, who was forced to attempt so many impossible feats.

Part 3: But that's Definitely Strange

The Pillow is way too competent, that I've no chances of victory.

Results are something gained by victory in battle.
Even if the battlefield changes, that fact remains constant. I glared at the pillow Leigie-sama was putting to use, as I considered my means.

The Lord of Sloth doesn't give much thought to anything. That's why whenever Leigie-

sama looks at me, all that comes to him is, 'Ah, so she's still here, is she?'

He probably doesn't care about anything. That is his form of nihility.
His strength of heart to protect himself was unrivalled. Leigie the Depraved's soul was always subdued, and it would never be moved by emotion. That's why he reached the position no one else had ever attained, the lone Lord of Acedia.

Since I've been secretly trying to burn up his pillows while he's asleep, I can say for sure. He doesn't even care about those. If he's thrown off of the bed, then he'll just start sleeping on the floor.
But I don't really care about that.

What's important to me, is that the current generation pillow is a pillow that can't be burned. Meaning besides the merit that I had the capability of motion, that pillow triumphed over me in every way.

Handed down by the Great Demon King, apparently.
A pillow forged of the down of infant Fire Dragons.
As a pillow, he didn't have a name. But he was an article so fine, it wouldn't be strange if he was granted one by his craftsman.
He was probably a compensation for all those times Lize burned through his pillow. That's why he won't burn.

At present, Dragons were the only race living in the Demon World that possessed power rivalling Demons. Their characteristics were their high attribute resistances, and durability, and even from a General Class Demon's powers, they weren't so easily knocked down. However, they were small in numbers, and with that, the down of an infant dragon was more valuable than any average magical artifact.
Once the dragon grew up, its plumage would change to scales. In its feather state, it definitely didn't boast the durability of scales, but still, it was much too great of an opponent for me to face.
By the way, this goes without saying, but among the Dragon Race, the greatest threat is their fangs and claws, as well as the attacks fired off from their tails. But now that it's become a pillow it can't attack or anything, so I've no need to worry over such matters.

"Damn you, Great Demon King… for you to get in my way…"

Even when I acted up in his bed alone, this lord showed absolutely no signs of giving a reaction. I'm not sure if he's completely uninterested, or he's truly sleeping.
Even when I lightly shake his body, touch his hands, or cling to him, he wouldn't move in the slightest, and I believed him to be truly worthy of such a pillow.

How rude. Even when I've thrown away my pride to present myself as a pillow to him, Leigie-sama probably hasn't even noticed something like that..
It was a major problem that shook up my dignity. And at the same time, it was quite futile.

While I was likely carrying out the most gruesome battle in this cruel world, I heard footsteps approaching the room.
There were two sets. The ones who come here are severely limited. It seems that assassins used to come here as well, but since Heard took over the surrounding area, that hasn't happened as of late.
In that case, I knew who would drop by.

Lorna or Lize Bloodcross.

I don't know much about the woman known as Lize.
What I know is that she's part of Kanon-sama's personal knight brigade, and that she was sent with the intentions of observing the Demon Lord as a member of the Order of Black.
I also knew she was relatively strong, but when you put it against Heard and Leigie, the stage was so different, that I couldn't really feel that much strength from her. What's more, the only chances she's had to demonstrate such strength was when she burned up this man's pillows. In a different sense than me, she was a pitiful woman.

As expected, the two sets of feet stopped in front of the door. I felt they would become a pain, so I dove my body deep under the covers, and clung onto Leigie-sama's body.

I'm a pillow. A pillow that can move of her own will.

With a small sound, the door opened. In order to let the matter pass, I held my breath.

"Huh? Medea isn't here?"

As I thought, it wasn't a matter for Leigie-sama, but one for me.
Right, I'm not here. So please go away already.
There are Skills to conceal your body on the Sloth Tree as well. Right now, I've become one and the same with Leigie-sama, and they shouldn't be able to sense my presence.

Lorna and Lize seemed to be having a quiet conversation about something. I can't really hear them. I want to use a Skill to listen in, but if I did that, then in all likelihood, Lize would sense it. Sloth Skills were made on the premise that their user wouldn't be doing anything.
If I move just a little further down the tree, then I should obtain one that lets me go about life without doing anything at all.

But unfortunately, my opponents are professionals at dealing with Sloth.
They are the brave heroes who have continued to serve one of the rare Sloth Demon Lords for many years on end. I doubt there's anyone in this vast Demon World more adept at dealing with Sloth than these women.
The cover was town away, and I was bathed in light and cold air as I continued to cling to Leigie-sama.

"… There should be a limit to running away from reality…"

Lize sounded utterly fed up.
Fine. I'm fine with running away from reality, so please just leave me be.
A hand was placed on the arms I was using to tighten my embrace.

"Now, Medea. Separate. Yourself. From. Leigie-sama!"

It was a fearsome display of superhuman strength. For an estimated Knight Class like Lorna, it should have been unthinkable for her to be able to pull a General like me's arms away.

But by some divine providence, my arms were just barely being moved away.

"Look, Lize. You lend a hand as well!"

"… Hah… why do I have to…"

Despite her complaints, Lize's hands were put around my torso.
Her power was probably over mine. If it came down to pure power, I'd never win.
This is no joke. If I get dragged off now, I'll get wrapped up in something troubling. There was no helping it, so I used a Sloth Skill.

"Unwork."

My body instantly became heavier, and the bed gave off a creaking sound.
My rising arms, as if gravity had suddenly increased, came down on Leigie-sama once more.
The Unwork Skill increased one's own weight, and among Sloth Skills, it was a rare Active. That weight increase wasn't something on the measly level of two or three times over.

But still, with the bed receiving enough force for it to begin to creak, Leigie-sama showed absolutely no signs of waking up.

Lize's frowned.

"Medea… for you to even use a Skill… how cruel…"

Shut it.
Even I can tell what's cruel or not. I'm well aware of it. You don't have to put it into words.

And at that moment, as I hid my face, Lorna's voice entered my ears.

"Medea… if you don't separate yourself, then I'll also use a Skill, you know?"

"… !?"

Chills ran up my spine, and alarm bells went off in my head.
Lorna's voice had been the same as normal. That's why it was bad. Could it be I tread on the tiger's tail?

No, wait.
Think about it calmly. Rank-wise, I'm above her. With the resistances I gained as Sloth, there's no way Lorna, who hasn't even had any combat training, would be able to separate me.

My heartbeat was heavy enough that my chest hurt. As if to contain it, I increased my grip on Leigie-sama.
Lorna's hand touched the nape of my neck. That's all she did, but a sensation as if a sword had been pressed to my carotid artery came down on me.

No, this is an illusion. As a Demon of Envy, I can say for sure. Luxuria barely has any physical prowess. She won't be able to do anything to me.

Then just what is this fear encroaching on me bit by bit?

“Medea… make sure you say uncle when you give up, okay?”

“…”

“But perhaps you won’t even be able to speak at that point…”

“… W-what are you…”

The moment I opened my mouth, it happened.
There wasn’t a single wound on me. There wasn’t any pain. But my instincts raised a scream.
My Mental Corruption Resistance Skill continued activating itself without end.

It was a painfully popular passive Skill among Demons. Even held by children, that Skill could identify any and every Skill meant to corrupt the mind, and render them null and void.
It was the Skill that made Luxuria the weakest, and once you reach General Class, it could invalidate almost one hundred percent of all things.

That’s why no matter how many Skills Lorna uses, I can’t think it will bring any effect onto me.
The reason for my shocks was the contents.

The Luxuria Skill Tree was simple. Mental Corruption included, it allowed one to grant any and every status abnormality, and specialized in glamor.
On something quite repulsing, I unintentionally moved my head, and confirmed Lorna’s expression.
Because I intentionally made a movement, the Unwork Skill was undone, and my weight vanished.

With a calm expression, Lorna directed her deep blue eyes at me.

“Wai… w-what are you trying to do to me!?”

“…”

I could tell she had done something by instinct.
Again and again, without any signs of giving up, with numbers enough for me to feel fear, the status abnormality she continuously tried to cast was the one that Lust was most suited in handling.

Its name was『Heat』.

This is no joke.
Even if I know it won’t affect me, I can’t take this as a joke.

“Take off your hand!”

“So you give in?”

But I don’t want that. I don’t want to feel like a loser.

In the first place, this is pointless. It won’t even work on a standard Demon, so there’s no way it would take effect on a Sloth like me. Her Mana will be the force running out first.

At that moment, I felt a bad premonition cross my mind.

How many times can she use it? How many tens? Hundreds? Thousands?

『Heat』 was the most basic ability of Lust. Even Demons who had just awoken to the Sin could use it. That means it barely had even the slightest Mana expenditure.
For a Knight Class like Lorna, then it wouldn't be strange for that to number in the thousands, or tens of thousands.

As if she had seen through my thoughts, she let out a gentle laugh. Her laugh was quite reminiscent of Hiero's, and their figures overlapped for a moment in my mind.
I was sure of it now. That a little sister like that gave way to a girl like this. No, that's the other way around.

"… Medea. Just how much resistance will you put up? A thousand? Ten thousand? Kusu… my 『Rat Sleep』 may take a bit of time, but… it will take effect on you eventually."

In the end, Status Abnormality Resistance was but a resistance… nullification based on identification. It wasn't complete nullification.
The probability of it getting through wasn't zero. It was ridiculously low, but, there are times when it would actually work. And at that time, I have no means of freeing myself from it.
Of course, the probability of it working wasn't something high enough for me to train for it on the battlefield. That's why I didn't pay it any mind before.

But if you look at it the other way…

Lorna gave out a declaration like that of a death sentence.

"I'll keep at it as long as it takes. If it's something on the level of 『Rat Sleep』… My mana recovery is higher than its usage."

"!?"

Meaning she can keep this up forever.
No matter how low the chances, if she was going to keep at it uptil it worked, then that was no different from one hundred.
Lize looked at Lorna with a cramped expression. It was probably the same as the look on my face at the moment.

"A-are you joking…?"

"…"

Even when she heard my chiding words, her smile didn't chip in the slightest.
It was frighteningly ominous, and the information flooding into my head of how each and every attempt to resist the Skill had succeeded was uncanny enough to jolt my heart.

This girl… is serious.

"Just getting me in heat isn't going to…"

… Isn't going to be of any merit to her… I think.

As I was about to say, that, Lorna held her fingertip to my lips to stop me.
What was before me was a single Luxuria Demon. Her pupils stained with lewdness seemed to lick all over my body as they evaluated me. That was the first sexual glance I had ever received since I started hiding in Leigie-sama's bed naked.

"… Kusu kusu… an unworking Medea… should just show off her unsightly form to Leigie-sama."

"N-no, isn't your intent changing…"

Thinking it bad, Lize offered some council to Lorna.
But in regards to that, Lorna threw out a carefree response.

"Lize, this girl's Sloth is… just inactivity. It's different to what Leigie-sama has."

"Eh…?"

What's different about it? That's what Lize's eyes were saying.
I was in complete agreement.
Just what's different? Why not try giving an answer.
No, I'm still moving around a bit, so aren't I more decent than…

At that point, from my ankle to my spine, a small impact raced.
It was simply too light, but the vividness of the sensation was enough to make my body leap without intent.

"Kusu kusu… look, it got you."

"…"

The temperature of my body rose a little. A ticklish fever created a thin haze over my brain.
My thoughts begin to come apart. My body is hot. My heartbeat was resounding to annoying levels.
It got me. In itself, it wasn't a fatal status abnormality. In the end, it's just a basic Skill.
Even without a recovery Skill, something of this level should go away given enough time.

Sloth Skills cut off my senses. Because of that, the vision through my fevered eyes made it feel like I was watching the isolated events of another world play out.
I let out a hot breath, and directed up some words that were half me putting up a strong front.

"… Hah… something of this level is…"

"… You don't know when to give up… Kusu kusu, you know what this is, right? Luxeliaheart. At this point… it's your loss."

A small light burned at the tip of Lorna's right index finger. It was a characteristically pink light. I could instantly determine it was something from a Skill. Even what Skill it was.
Luxuria Skills were short range, and most of them wouldn't activate without direct contact. In the first place, even if they did go off, they would be put down by status resistances.

But these unsurmountable demerits came with unsurmountable merit.

Luxuria was a Skill Tree to affect the mind. You have to fulfill the conditions first, but once that's done, it can exhibit unrivalled power.
With me clinging onto Leigie-sama like this, I've no means to avoid it.
『Rat Sleep』 had not activated itself yet. After my resistances had been ringing off alarms for so long, they had fallen silent. Lust had its stages. First, to light the flame, then to spread the fire.

And this presents the main problem, my status abnormality resistance wasn't going off anymore. Meaning I would be out in a single hit.

As if to enchant me, Lorna slowly brought her finger to my body.
Her slender fingers lightly brushed against the back of my neck. With just that, my mind, which was supposed to have been cut off from sexual passions, was thrown into disarray.

"I'll make you bloom."

I'm being driven mad.
That voice was filled with an ample amount of darkness. It wasn't by much, but it was something I wasn't able to stand.
At this rate, I'm going to have a mental trauma for the rest of my life. Or perhaps I'll awaken to yet another sin.

"U-uncle! I give, I give up!"

Lorna looked at my face, before nodding once. That was enough to make my beat to jump up.
I don't even know what's going on anymore. I might cry.

"… Where's your apology?"

"I'm sorry."

"… Leigie-sama's mattress has been stained… I'll have to wash it again…"

She took a fleeting glance at the place I had been before looking down at me again.
The scary part was that I couldn't see an emotion of anger in her. She was likely the type that could kill with a smile. If she had entered the army, then perhaps she would have become a soldier much more prodigious than I.

"Medea. Put on clothing at once, and take a seat. I have something to discuss with you."

Her tone that didn't ask for a yes or no, made me straighten up my back as I sat up on the bed.
Her eyes were shining. If I didn't bring out as much speed as physically possible, Lorna was going to break me. That was the most repulsing, and unbecoming manner of a soldier.

"Y-yes."

I lifted my still-itching body, and put on the clothes Lorna had prepared.
I pulled the undergarments over my flesh, and draped the battle clothing I had often

worn before over them.
They were made of a mass of dark materials, and they didn't boast enough defensive power to block a direct blow, but they had a special magic carved into them to mitigate attribute damage to a certain extent.

Naturally, they were stiff, and they didn't feel too good to wear. That's the reason why, once I had a slight change in occupation to be a pillow, I've never once put my arms through those sleeves.

This is… a bothersome scent tickled my nose.

I did take a quick look at the bed, but losing to Lorna's smile, I reluctantly stood.
Honestly, I'm terrified. In the first place, I couldn't even raise my head to look at her. She was an existence like a mother. I always feel like apologizing about this and that to her.

As I sat in a chair with good manner, Lize and Lorna stood before me.
Their eyes were serious. Of course they were. Never once has Lize ever had any business with me since I've become a pillow. I'll say this time and again, but no matter how noisy it gets out there, the Castle of Shadows will always be at peace.

Could it be… I'm sacked? Just by spending a few months as a pillow? No, no, I mean, that's my job to begin with… and firing isn't something decided but Lorna or Lize. That's Leigie-sama's job…

There were bags forming under Lize's eyes. I've heard she's been busy lately. Even a moment's thought could make me feel how heavy a responsibility it would be to work as Heard Lauder's observing officer. My deepest condolences.

Lize hesitated, but soon started talking in the cold tone of a superior giving order to their subordinate.

"Medea Luxeliaheart, there is a single job for you."

… Don't want to.
I wanted to answer that, but the glint in Lorna's eyes kept me silent.
The answer I gave a few seconds later wasn't something by my own will.

"… What?"

Battle? That's the one with the highest probability. I'm a former General. If you look at it from another perspective, that's pretty much the only thing I'm capable of.
If it was battle against, I guess I'd manage one way or another. Even if it be against another General, it would probably work out. As long as they weren't a monster like that Heard Lauder.

I mean, I have that thing I got from envying Leigie-sama, 『Miracle Wonder Lighthand』.
I can't use the left hand portion of it, but for an average demon, the right hand was more than enough. Just as Zebul didn't know of it, that Skill was an unknown entity that barely anyone had ever seen before.

It's a pain, but if it will let me evade those eyes of Lorna, then it's unavoidable.

I don't want it… being thrown into heat outside of my will is the worst. This is why

Luxuria's so wicked.
It's also the reason that, when I envied that Lilith Luxeliaheart, I copied not her status abnormality Skills, but just her Skills to create illusions.
Taking away one's free will is really the work of a Demon. No, that's what I am, but…

But the words that came out when Lize opened her mouth next were a bolt out of the blue.
And at the same time, they were the worst.

"In Leigie-sama's stead, you are to answer Kanon-sama's summons."

"Eh? Why?"

I unintentionally blinked my eyes, and looked at the face of the Great Demon King's apostle.
The fact that she looked apologetic for a second didn't escape me.

On the other side, without a hint of apologetics on her face, Lorna gave me my answer.

"That's obvious. It's because Leigie-sama is busy…"

"Eh? What part of him is?"

I looked over at the bed.
As usual, Leigie-sama was sleeping, as if he were dead. Even when his surroundings are this loud, I have nothing to say about his ability to concentrate.
I wonder how Leigie-sama has lived a life this long… Recently, I've begin thinking about that reason once more, and I've no answer to it.
In the past, I thought that, since I wasn't a Sloth Demon, I wouldn't be able to fathom the answer anyways, but even after gaining Sloth, I couldn't understand it.

Seeing me like that, Lorna gave a brazen declaration.

"Do you have knotholes for eyes? Can you not see that Leigie-sama is busy taking his rest in peace?"

"No, that is…"

Yes, I can tell that.
I understand that, but that is completely irrelevant to being busy, is it not?
I'm not that free either, you know? Like thinking about how to better become a pillow, or peeping in on other Demons, I've got quite a bit on my plate.

Of course, I won't say that. It's scary.

Lorna is a little off in the head department, so I helplessly looked to Lize. She was considerably the more decent of the two. And that's exactly why she's going through such troubles.

"… It's a customary practice for Demon Lords, or representative General Class Demons to stop by Kanon-sama when she calls a meeting. At this point, you're the lone member of Leigie-sama's army, so…"

"That is…"

Exactly right. Leigie's army of thousands has been reduced to a single pillow. But I don't want to go.

This is where Leigie-sama should go. That is his duty as a Demon Lord.
No, really, its not just that I don't want to go, if you think about it logically, isn't that how it's supposed to go?

As I tried to speak, Lorna interposed herself, and made an imposing argument at Lize with just her eyes.
After a moment's hesitation, Lize averted her eyes, and spoke.

"Not moving Leigie-sama is part of the Great Demon King's will."

"Eh? Isn't that strange?"

What is the meaning of this? Leaving that man asleep is part of the Great Demon King's will?
She permits him to shirk off his regular obligations?

If the Great Demon King was to convene a meeting, it could only be one thing.

『Demons Round』

A round table opened only when the Demon World was to face a time of crisis. It's getting noisy in the world outside, so it probably has something to do with that.
Demon Lords are generally self-serving, but there are few fools out there who would defy the Great Demon King. Those faces dispersed across the lands should all be gathered there.
And with it being a gathering of Demons who've raised their sins to their limits, it was an inevitable instance of putting the cart before the horse, where casualties were often reported.
So let me declare it. If a General Class went out, they'd be crushed in an instant.

"… That is the Great Demon Lord's will. Medea, do you plan on opposing that?"

"… Eh? No… but still, that's definitely strange…"

"By the way, up to now, Heard Lauder has always been the one going in his stead."

…
Just how soft is everyone being on our Leigie-sama?
But I don't want to go. I really don't want to go.
Leigie-sama's already the lowest ranking Demon Lord. You can't just permit him to skip out. I get that if he was Rank Three, it may be permitted, but for the lowest ranked of them all to not even show up, I doubt there won't be complaints. Right, there definitely will be. There's no doubt there will be some political turmoil if the individual in question doesn't step out himself.

Right. That's right.

Within my head, my Mini-Medea was crying out such things.
But reality wasn't so kind. Lize strained her voice to a lethal level.

"Kanon-sama even ordered for you, Medea, to be dispatched in his place."

"… Eh? I was called by name?"

With unbelievable emotions, I looked up at Lize's face.
I don't get what she means. Why must I…

"Yes, you were called by name. If Leigie-sama's asleep when you get there, then be a dear and go drag Medea out here, won't you?"

"…"

I heard the sound of Lize's arm being clad in flames. Her power was undoubtedly over mine.

Kanon's figure came up in my mind.
Back when I had just gotten here, the figure of the observer charged with Leigie-sama.

That woman… she's favoring the man.
A hopeless reality was coloring the world beyond my eyes in black.
She occasionally called him 'niisama,' and she was always soft on him, so I knew it would definitely bring about something one of these days, but with this terrible timing…

I was sure she was impartial…

And on the other side, the maid who did with me what she pleased landed in the finishing blow.

"Medea, if you meet up with Heard, make sure you ask him to let you join in his army, okay?"

"… Heard Lauder…"

I recalled the form of the man who detested Envy Demons like the plague.
This is bad. I'm so dead.

I hath been forsaken by all. And it all happened while I was asleep.
Did I even do anything bad? This is just too much.

"… Nn…"

In this situation where there was nothing for me to do, I fell flat over the table before me, and started crying to myself.

Part 4: Now That's Just Terrible

The『Palace of Rending Flames』.

The castle the Great Demon Lord, Kanon Iralaude set as her stronghold was also the most important site in the entire Demon World.
Its scale didn't reach up to Leigie's Castle of Shadows, but its construction boasted of

countless spires that reached up through the skies, and it carried about it an sinister air, as if the entirety of its designs had been but an insult to the heavens.
Just as the flames of purgatory, Kanon of Ruin's rage could be felt by all who set foot into her land, and the power that could be felt at its center made one think that a single touch from her would burn even their soul to a crisp. All would hang their heads in awe before the Great Demon King.

But she was a Brocon.

It wasn't in her character, but she was a brocon. Mentioning that was the single taboo that existed within this vast Demon World.
If I were to leak that information, then my own soul would be doomed to burn away to cinders. I'm always cautious as to not let the fact out in my sleep talk.
If a single word were to escape my lips, then the entire area around where I stood would be reduced to nothing but scorched earth. Without understand anything of what was going on, the countless Demons within a large radius of me would have their lives drawn to a close.

Despite this and that, Kanon Iralaude was a Demon Lord who governed Wrath. Her anger wasn't something anyone could control, herself included. And its output was needlessly high, even enough to burn through Leigie-sama's resistance.
Ira Skills generally have ridiculous output, but there were many cases where it couldn't be controlled. That was the burden that those who continued to pursue Ira to its depths had to bear.

She herself did seem to be mindful of it, but whenever she was by Leigie-sama's side, she would frequently let out those incessant `niisama's, to a point where one would even begin to wonder if she had any intention of concealing it, so even if I covered my ears, it would reach me.
If you're the Great Demon King, then go get some dignity already. The hell's with niisama? It's not like he's your real brother or anything.

I was posed holding on to the neck of a flying dragon, as a launched complaints at Kanon-sama in my head. I sulked as I looked over the outside world.
While it may be the Palace of Rending Flames, the land here wasn't as hot as the Prison of Flames, or the Crimson Prison. The Great Demon King's Wrath was, when compared to the Demon Lords of history, under frighteningly delicate control. That's why, when aboard a flying dragon, a nicely cool wind lapped against my face, and gave me quite a comfortable feeling. If my goal wasn't to attend the meeting at the entrance to the River Stix, then I might have actually enjoyed it.

By the way, Lize's the one piloting the dragon, so I'm free. I'd like some praise for working so hard.
It's been around a year since I last rode a dragon this far.

Perhaps some apologetic sentiment had arisen in her, as Lize directed some mindful words at me. And that was quite a pain.

"Medea… you really are becoming identical to Leigie…"

Is that supposed to be praise, or is she making fun of me? I hesitated for a moment.
Normally, being equated to a Demon Lord is supposed to be praise. But this time, it's that Leigie-sama we're talking about.

…

"… Thank you."

Still, in the end, I'm but an imitation.
Everything started to not matter anymore, and I gained sloth for half a decent reason. The girl who gained such a sin is third rate, by no doubt. It isn't by much, but I'm in no way a Demon to be compared to Leigie-sama.

If possible, I'd have liked to gain it after becoming a Demon Lord. But if I had just continued to pursue Envy like that, then in the end, I wouldn't have become a Demon Lord anyways.
No matter the case, it was too abnormal. Envying a pillow… it was even more decent back when I was envying Lorna. Even when the result of that didn't elicit the slightest reaction from Leigie-sama.

In that sense, my future is already pitch black. Pairing up the emotions of Envy with Sloth doesn't make anything of use. There's no helping it.
In that case, I should just live on as a pillow. Yep, let's do that. I'll become the ultimate pillow.

Then one day, they'll call out to me. The Pillow Lord.

"… Kuh…"

"Medea!? W-why are you crying!?"

I'm not… crying.
This is just sweat. Tears are something born of blood. Like what I shed long ago.

While I was carrying out that pointless conversation, the Flying Dragon descended onto one of the spires of the palace. It was the dragon post.
Apart from ours, there was over ten other dragons restlessly pacing back and forth.

The Demons dismounting from then were men and women of all ages. Monsters, animals, tentacles, each and every sort of form, but there was a single point that kept them all aligned.

The fact that each and every one of them possessed powers beyond General Level.

No, there's a single Knight Class. I quietly hid in the shadow of the dragon.
Lightly patting the mouth area of the dragon to offer her gratitude, Lize tilted her head as she looked at me.

"Did something happen?"

"… Why is Hiero…"

I stuck out only my face to confirm it. She was definitely reflected on my eyes.
Mixed in with the Demon World's elite, a single Demon of small power.

Beautiful golden hair and blue eyes like a doll's. The hair that grew up to her shoulders was done up in twin tails. After being tossed around so recklessly by Heard, she showed not a trace of fatigue, and at that, I could only let out a sigh of admiration.

As expected of Superbia… Even when surrounded by a flock of Demons much greater than her, her movements didn't show the slightest of lapse. It may have just been the girl's personality, but the hospitality of her face was something I could only feel jealousy towards.

Luckily for me, it didn't seem that Heard Lauder was here.

"… Why are you hiding…?"

Lize's tired words stung my ears.
If that's Hiero's nature, then this is mine. I have much too much trauma. And in a place like this, it will only hinder my function.

"No, I mean, you…"

"I know."

I knew what Lize wanted to say. I knew it enough, that it hurt. When there was a Demon of lower power than me carrying herself so boldly, I can't keep myself hiding in a corner like this.
Regardless of how it came to pass, I am currently Leigie-sama's representative. My behavior will drop Leigie-sama's status.
Even if Leigie-sama himself cared for it less than the nail on his pinky, it was something my own pride wouldn't allow.

… Because despite what I say, it's not like I hate Leigie-sama.

I resolved myself, and held out my chest, as I wandered over to Hiero.

"Hiero… it's been a while."

"… Medea… san?"

Her face distorted for a moment, before returning to a smile. That part of her really resembled Lorna.
After looking over my body once, with a fed up bearing, her tone turned sour.

"… I'm surprised you can just show yourself before my eyes like that. Because I ended up saving you, I was sure I was going to be killed, you know?"

"… That was you reaping what you sowed."

She did go against Heard's will, and save my life, and that might have put her own life in jeopardy.
But that was something brought about by her own discretion. I may not be in a position to say this, having been saved and all, but that definitely wasn't my fault. Anyone would have run away there.
Seeing my expression, Hiero sighed with a mature expression unbefitting her years.

"Well, I did end up surviving, so I guess it doesn't really matter… so what business have you?"

"… Business?"

No, I don't really have anything like that.

Seeing one of my few acquaintances, I just wanted to call out. Unlike Deije, or Heard, I haven't been around all too much.
Taking my attitude in some strange direction, Hiero raised a bright voice.

"Ah, could it be that you wanted to offer some thanks for being saved? Kusu kusu kusu, despite your scarce body, you've got quite a nice sense of duty there."

"…"

She really phrases everything in a way that touches a nerve, this Demon.
Well, I didn't have such intentions, but come to think of it, Hiero was kidnapped by Heard before I knew it, so I didn't have such an opportunity.
Since it was by her own whim, I don't have the obligation to thank her, but the truth of the matter is that I was spared.

I furrowed my brow, and tried asking, for arguments sake.

"… What do you want of me?"

"Ah! So that was true? Um… I saved your life, so I can ask for whatever I want, right?"

She crossed her fingers, and looked up at me in a flirtatious manner.
It was mortifying, but that doesn't change how lovable that gesture was. Even with this personality, she was Lorna's sister, and unlike her, she sure knew how to show that off.
I kept myself wary, as I answered.

"Ask away."

"… Then please trade places with m–"

"Rejected."

"Eh~!? W-what was that!?"

Outrageous. She was more decent when she was still at Leigie-sama's side knowing she wouldn't get anything of it.
I ignored her screams, and reunited with Lize, who was looking over at us with fed up eyes. That was a waste of time. Let's go over to the conference room already.

Still… I see. Trade places, is it?
Even if she didn't show it on her face, the training from Heard did seem to be having an effect on her.

… Her personality hadn't changed, but I wonder just what it was Heard was attempting to drill into her. Power as a Demon?

I gave Hiero, who tried to pursue with teary eyes, a cold reception, as I continued forward.

The Demon Lords of other lands rarely chanced by the Castle of Shadows, so they probably didn't know, but the inside of the Palace of Rending Flames largely resembled Leigie-sama's place.
The floor, and walls, and ceilings were all done in ink black stone, and the strange

patterns carved along the passageways bore similar likeness. What differed was that, as the castle's Lord over here governed wrath, the air here was full of a quietly burning aura.
This is the second time I've come here, but it was something I thought the time before as well.

I don't know if Kanon's put a stop to that brocon tendency of hers. If she likes her niisama so much, then she should just call him over. It's because she's like that, that someone like me ends up being forced to come here.

While holding in such complains, I didn't forget to be vigilant.
I'd like to think I won't face an assault before the meeting, but Demons were a race where you couldn't know what could happen next. The law of the jungle. Self-serving. It was a world where you could call something wrong merely because it was weak.

Lize was acting as a guide, but regardless of who she may be, I doubt she was a match for Demon Lord Class.

Those guys are monsters. Much greater than the gap between General and Knight was the disparity between General and Demon Lord. It was likely greater than anything we could imagine.
That was something I could understand from when a legendary Demon Blade couldn't even raise the slightest resistance against Zebul.

Perhaps it was rare for someone like me to be present, as I felt magic probe through my body. Out of curiosity, some eyes followed me as I went by.
After walking a while, the site of this time's meeting came into sight. Even without being told, it was a clear swirl of Mana. Gathered over time, that dark Mana told me, even without thinking too hard about it, that this was the point of death.

Greed, Lust, Wrath, Envy, Pride, Gluttony.

Sloth aside, Demon Lords governing those six attributes clamored around, and that place was probably the most dangerous site in the entirety of the Demon World.
And me, filling in for Leigie Slaughterdolls, of the Slaughterdolls. By adding on my power, that wasn't even enough to patch up the holes, a total of seven sins had been gathered there.
(TL: Yes, both Leigie's title, and last name, are 'Slaughterdolls')

There was nothing good to come of it. Because of our longings, we were a race that conflicted with one another.

The fighting I couldn't think of as coming from an allied force raged up as if to prove just how war-driven the Demon Lords were, and it brought pain to my stomach. Even before entering the room, it felt as if the forces on the other side were considering how exactly to squash a bug. It was detestable, in many ways.

Beside me, Hiero had tagged along for fun, as if she were a cat. She didn't think a single thing upon having reached this point.

"Ah, have we arrived? Then~ I'll be going ahead!"

With a sunflower-esque smile, she put her hand on the door without hesitation, and pushed it open.

Just where does she hide such confidence in that small stature?

"Heard Lauder-sama? I've finished taking care of the Flying Dragon!"

Rank One. The greatest bearer of Pride among the Demon Lords, was the first thing she spoke upon treading into the haunt of evil.

The moment I saw that, I could understand it.

Ah, she's a fox borrowing the dignity of a tiger. What should I do? It feels quite pleasant thinking of it like that.
The moment her mildly-short skirt fluttered as she stepped through those doors, I could see it. That the delicate legs concealed beneath it were quivering a little.
Perhaps Lize saw it as well, as she whispered in an expression mixed with wonderment and respect.

"… She's quite something."

"Right. I can't lose to her either."

"No, you're…"

To interrupt the words Lize wanted to voice, I stepped through the doorway.
I felt the gazes converge on me. The gazes blacker than the depths of the Demon World's darkness. The grounds of Demon Lord and Demon Lord. There wasn't any killing intent, but what was there was malice, and eyes filled with strong desire, which were probably merely a breath of fresh air to those of Demon Lord Class.

… Passions great enough to violate the souls around them.

The Demon Lords here understand it.

That those that reach this place were Demons of the same level as themselves, and threats to their own existences. That fact served to hone their minds, making the place somewhere much more calamitous than the greatest of battlefields.

An elder stanced like a withered tree. A young boy a head shorter than me.
A balloon-like bloated body with pitiful limbs making up the body of a man.
A black haired girl perhaps even younger than Hiero, and a large baldheaded man with armor-like muscles enveloping him.
A metallic inorganic humanoid mass of indistinguishable gender, and a half-transparent woman whose body floated through the air. And so on, and so forth.

As one who worked at the Castle of Shadows, and served as Leigie-sama's guard, they were faces I knew. There was but a handful of names to remember.
But I can only express my admiration at the sheer variety these peculiar Lords have managed to achieve for themselves.

When they're this overflowing with personality, then a simple slim male Demon like Leigie-sama starts to lack a sense of individuality. No, perhaps it's the opposite… I mean, Leigie-sama would probably be fast asleep, even at a place like this…

"…"

Among them, the greatest of stares made my heart contract. I turned my eyes to the

figure sitting closest to Kanon-sama.

Heard Lauder. He was probably the newest Demon Lord here, the most Decent of the lot, and the strongest Demon Lord of Pride.
Seeing his form here, his gaze told me that his impression of me was still the absolute worst.
The reason he didn't issue a complaint was because this was a meeting space, or perhaps because I was the representative of Leigie-sama. I think it was probably the latter.

And that woman of tall stature sitting at the head of the table was the perpetrator of it all.

The one who ruled over a large portion of this extensive Demon World, leader of the strongest force, the『Great Demon King's Army』.
The master of that, as well, as well as the incarnations of Wrath, said to bring ruin to all creation with her flames of purgatory.

The Lord of Ruin.
Kanon Iralaude.
Unthinkable of the violent emotions that formed the base of her Sin, the lights of wisdom and intellect dwelled in her eyes.
But she was a brocon.

"Ah, Medea Luxeliaheart. Leigie-niisa… Leigie of Sloth's representative. Take a seat."

"… Yes."

I'm not even going to retort anymore. It's not like any of this is relevant to me. Just do whatever you want.

To shake off the awkward air, I took my place at the foot of the table.
Even if it may be round table, the seating was based on rank. Leigie of Sloth was the Lowest possible rank, so his seat was the furthest one from Heard Lauder. That was my sole spot of luck. Let's get this over with already so I can run away.

My not-too-short life experience was calling out to me. I'm… screwed.

In the place I could only think of as a bed of spikes, I lowered myself into a luxurious black chair, and without uttering a word, I looked over the others present.

More than half the seats were filled, but including the empty seats, there was a smaller amount of places at the table than I had expected.
That means that's just how many Demon Lords had fallen. While I myself don't want to take them on alone, regardless of what Lord they be, Demons die when they are killed.

Compared to my suspicious behavior, Lize was carrying herself as grandly as always. She straightened up her spine, and displayed not a hint of unrest.
In a small voice, I offered a complaint.

"Lize."

"… What?"

"… From what I can see, I'm the only representative here…"

Everyone's a Demon Lord.
Each and every one of the figures surrounding the round table were of the class that ruled over this world. The ones by their sides are likely their inspectors. Even if they may be of the Great Demon King's personal order, comparing their powers to the Lords put them in quite an unfavorable standing. And there was one lower than all of them… Me.
The one with the lowest power over all was Hiero, but that wasn't even any consolation. Together, we'd still be taken out in a single punch. One punch.

"… Of course. The Demon Lords will generally take up attendance, you know. They have to show off their might and all…"

"…"

I've been fooled.
No, I'd known I'd been fooled for quite some time. I'm not in heat anymore, yet, the beating of my heart has become overly violent.
I grimaced, and forced myself to play calm.

And finally, at that time, I noticed it.
There was something at the center of the table.

A shadow like a black sphere. Its size was around that of a soccer ball, and even when there wasn't any wind, it was rolling around. Towards me.
My application of『Sky Right Hand』and the mass growing limbs happened at around the same time.
I instinctively swung my arm at it. The mass greatly contracted its legs, and like a spring, it came flying at me with lightning speed.
Its wide-open mouth, with blade-like fangs lined up closed in to a few centimeters in front of my face, before I succeeded in deflecting it.

I somehow stifled the scream that surfaced. No, I didn't even have time to scream.

What was that!?

Before I could seek held from Lize, she raised a scream in my place.

"Who was it!? Who summoned a『Preta』!?"

The Preta I deflected changed targets. It bounced off at the metal-bodied Demon Lord of unknown origin sitting in front of me.
Regardless of its small body, the speed it unleashed wasn't something a General Class like me could follow with my eyes. But the changing scene went far from my realm of understanding.
I barely saw the movement of iron-like arms. With a short sound, the thing called Preta burst open like a tomato. Pale blue blood scattered, and fell onto the girl to my side.

The next instant, the girl with an outward appearance similar to mine's arm changed shape to a steel pole.
The room shook greatly. By the time I noticed it, the metal Demon Lord's body had been buried into the wall. The girl's face remained expressionless.

At the stream of circumstance leaving me behind, I could do not but let off a cold sweat amd blink my eyes.
He was hit. She hit him. At a speed I couldn't see. Expressionlessly.

"… Hey, stop it."

As if obstructed by Kanon-sama's words, countless orbs began to fall from the ceiling.

Wai… these are all that thing from before…

After bouncing once, they all split to show off their giant mouths.
I saw countless of those knife-like fangs lined up one after the other.
Each of them grew their own limbs. Looking closely, their arms were much more robust than mine. Based on their previous conduct, their explosive power was far from perfect, though.

I don't have enough lives for this one.

I tried to brush them all away with Sky Hand, and Kanon-sama shout blew it all away.

"I told you to stop!!"

Along with the cry, a raging fire passed in front of my body. After the flame had left, not a single one of the numerous Pretas remained.
That destruction that happened before I could even be given the chance to feel feverish was truly worthy of her name, Kanon of Ruin.

The metal body of the Lord in the wall leisurely rose.
He barely had any wounds. But only his right arm had vanished as if it had been shaved away.
No. It wasn't shaved off.

I saw through it.

… This is『Usurping』.

"Schitol, return it already."

"… Fu."

The young girl Demon Lord known as Schitol snorted at the Great Demon King's words.

And at around the same time, her body was sent flying.
The metallic Demon Lord hit her. Though all I could see was the result of her being hit into the air.
Despite his slow-looking build, that was quite some acceleration.

Schitol's head pierced into the ceiling, and dangled for a while. Fresh blood dripped down to stain the black table.

I want to go home.
Just by being here, I can gradually feel my power of Sloth whittling away.
And of course there would be casualties if it's like this…

The young girl's body lost to gravity, and fell from the ceiling.
I could see her expression.
There was nothing but despair in the pitch black exes visible beyond the red trickling of blood.
The expression alone was a symbol of the hell of desire, great enough to fold any normal Demon's heart. That which made clear the gap between me and a Demon Lord was, if put into words, perhaps a 'difference in character.'

Right as she landed, she lowered her raised arms at the metal Demon Lord's body. From her footing, I couldn't imagine that she had taken any considerable damage.
That attack without and hesitation, as if her malice had been creeping up on him with the passage of time was much too vivid.

And yet, the metal bodied Demon Lord blocked it.
The fleeting sound of a barrier shattering due to pure physical might rang out, and the ground made of highly-durable stone caved in.

"Oy, Schitol. I told you to return it."

"The one to return it to will be gone soon enough."

Schitol returned a level voice.

That wasn't even an answer.
But of course, I didn't put that to words. If it won't directly bring any trouble to me, then you guys can do whatever it is you want.
Well, this display of power is a trouble to my mind, but…

His left arm disappeared, and as that happened, Schitol's left arm changed to one of metal.
With both of her arms made of iron bars taller than her own height, the girl's form was nothing but bizarre.

As that new existence shook her body, Heard, who had been quite up to now, let out a gloomy voice.

"Can't we finish this up faster? I'm busy."

There was the sound of something bursting. Having lost its head, Schitol's body slowly collapsed onto the ground.

"… No mercy…"

With unappealing sentiment, I whispered. No matter how you look at it, that was too abrupt.

Heard Lauder lowered his fist. The Prideful Kaised hadn't even moved from where he was. He just pressed his elbow into the table, and looked at Schitol with an uninterested look on his face.
As if that seat was his own throne.
It was as if the distance between himself and the girl had been meaningless from the start.

The extent of speed he displayed was enough to silence the room. Within that, I who was probably second from the bottom in power let out a sigh.

Still, it's finally going to start, is it… it hasn't even commenced, and yet there's already been way too much bloodshed…
I whispered in my heart, as I listlessly looked over at Schitol, and at that moment, her eyes met with mine.

"… Fu."

The head that was supposed to be gone had regrown itself. That wasn't the speed of regeneration. I was sure I was looking at her most of the time, but I had never even seen the moment she started to heal.
Still collapsed over, as if nothing had happened, Schitol bent her lips into a smile.

What's with this Demon Lord!? This is way too absurd, is it not?

First, let's see what Rank she…

When those thoughts were going through my head, my eyes were completely taken by darkness.

* * * * *

"What happened?"

"… I died before the conference even started…"

With weary emotions, I rubbed my head into Leigie-sama's back.

Thank god. That I sent an illusion.
Thank god. That I can still use『Phantom Aliquot Dance』.
Thank god. That I didn't take Lize's words too seriously, and actually go out myself.

Even if they may be Demon Lords, that was just too cruel. No mystery why there'd be casualties there. Those are tried and true monsters, ain't they?
Great Demon King Kanon, Heard Lauder, and Lilith Luxeliaheart are all starting to look sane to me. Leigie-sama's harmlessness was enough to make him seem lovable. That must have been the haunt of the greatest of beasts.

I wonder what they were planning to speak of in such a space, and wait, I wonder if Lize is alright. I had quite a few things to consider, but surprisingly, the greatest thing on my mind was the stoic front of a single young lass.

Is Hiero okay…
If she died, would Lorna be sad?

Furrowing my brow, I looked to the maid trying to pull me away, thought of such pointless things, and once more, I embraced Leigie-sama with all my might.

TL: Sketch by Julia Luckett Feb. 14 2011, I take absolutely no claim.

Chapter 4: Supervia's Arrogance

Part 1: Abnormal, and Foolish

This was back when I had just developed awareness.
There was something I tried asking oneechan.

"Why is it that we only have first names?"

All of those Demons out there were made of both a first, and last name.
The first that proved their individuality, and the last that defined their way of life.
If they hadn't decided on how they were going to live on, then in most cases, they took on the last name of their ancestors.
That's why, as Demons, it was unthinkable that those of a house that's served a Demon Lord for generations couldn't have a last name.

And to me, the sister that boasted an identical appearance offered a short answer. Kindly, as if to caution me.

"The way we live our lives is decided by our Lord. That's why our predecessors have no last names."

I simply couldn't believe it.
Once in a distant past…
Me, and my parents, and the parents before that and in the generation even before that lot was born, our continuous line was something you could call a form of legend.
It's not like we performed service on the battlefield, and it's not like we successfully followed our desires.

If I were forced to say, then our family's last name was『Shadow』.

The Lord of Depravity who, as a Demon, boasted a providence much too undemonlike. For us, who continued to nestle ourselves close to him, we could be nothing but pure shadows.

We weren't weak, but you wouldn't be able to call us strong either.
Strength was unnecessary to a shadow. All that we wished for was to serve, and it wasn't the sort of service we were rewarded for.

The existences that continued to serve the Lord who spent his time meaninglessly, were likely just as meaningless.

I remembered back to my ancestors.
I didn't know what had happened several tens of thousands of years ago. I couldn't even hazard a guess.
But killing off the cravings that dwelled in their bodies, they spent an eternity accompanying their Lord, and living while concealing their breaths. They were likely more abnormal than any of those third rate Demons lying around out there, and much more foolish.

That's why, oneechan included, I sneered at my predecessors.

On that day, rained poured to the ground, as if the heavens were weeping. The violent

sound of the rain drumming against the glass window, and the reverberating rumble of thunder.
In the darkness, the figure of my body reflected back at me was identical to oneechan, but only my eyes were a little different.

My ancestors, my patents, my siblings, and even the Lord I was to serve. I sneered at them all.

And as if even to sneer at the girl who did all of that, the blue eyes I saw were earnestly probing my expression.

Lightning lit the scene.

On rainy nights, the miasma would grow thick. Among the Demons of the Demon World, the holders of strong negative souls, that was passed as a simple superstition.
But on the other side of the glass which interrupted the darkness, I saw my figure putting on a smile so dazzling even I couldn't believe it.
There wasn't a hint of miasma in those lips.
All those pitch black emotions were enclosed within me, and not a fragment of them was to leak out.

Right.

That must be my『Superbia』.

Not to raise myself to a higher platform, merely a heinous vice to scorn all others.

Effort was unnecessary.
Strength was unnecessary.
Friendship was unnecessary.

All of it, everything was… just stupid.
Even if the result were to isolate me, if I'm just to quietly find my spot in the grave without even a name, then I choose the path that would shine some light onto myself, as temporary as it may be.

Within the polished, mirror-like class, the gold-haired woman giggled to herself.
That should have been me, and yet, she lacked a sense of reality.

"Kusu kusu… no matter how you look at it… holding yourself back too much…"

A somewhat sweet, and slovenly tone poured out of my mouth.
Right. This is the shape of Hiero's soul.

If you desire it, then seek it.
If your Lord is idle, then take action.
Overrule everything in this vast Demon World.

In order for me to stay as me.
If desire is what's to decide the power of Demons, then…

There's no doubt that my Superbia is the mark of the world's strongest Demon.
Within the darkness, my lips bent into the shape of a smile.

… I mean look at just how brightly I'm shining.

My image swirled around the frame of the window. The light caught onto my golden hair, and glistened.
It was as if it were the portrait of a fairy, yet for some reason, it appeared tasteless.

"… Lord of Sloth, please look at me. Please remember me. My name, my form, my voice, my soul…"

Spending a pointless lifetime not feeling anything, without thinking anything, not recording anything to memory, for you, who never cared in the slightest for us, my existence will be…

Kusu kusu kusu.

Right. Then first comes introducing myself.

"My name is Hiero. Hiero of Superbia."

No last name, no way of life, just a normal Demon
But I'll accumulate my desire, and show you as I wash out the heavens.

I am Hiero of Superbia.

But you don't have to prostrate yourself before me. You won't have to kneel. I don't need your worship.
I've no need to make you fools out there understand me.

I'm on top, and you're at the bottom. That's all.

It's fine as long as you understand that.

But things went beyond my expectations in the blink of an eye.

Part 2: They are the Worst

Overrule.

It was the most famous power possessed by Pride Demons.
I think it's pointless Skill. Something like that shouldn't be necessary in the first place..

… If you're truly Pride.

Because even if it didn't appear to me as a Skill, I had already 『Overruled』 everything.

… Besides oneechan.

Before my eyes, Medea-san slowly toppled over. Within the swirls of the Demon Lords' mana, the smallest present by far disappeared like the fleeting light of a lone candle.
Even for me, that sudden departure was outside my expectations, and I unintentionally opened my eyes wide to stare at Medea-san's falling small stature.

A large hole had been opened right in the center of her body. It clearly showed that she had been pierced by something.
The hole itself was wide enough that if I looked through, I thought I might see the world beyond.

After meeting her for once in quite a while, Medea had become quite slackened. I wonder just what sake she was living for anymore. It was too much of a way of life for me to take up. In a way, it was worthy of admiration.

In that sense, I didn't actually hate Medea-san all that much.
Even if, through her narrow escape it looked like Heard-san was going to kill me… well… Medea-san is… a pitiful Demon. Enough that just thinking about her existence was enough to elevate my power a little. Her being was able to contest for the first and second place of the most trifling Demons I had ever met, and even when her height exceeded mine ever-so-slightly, her chest was even more barren than me. There wasn't even any comparison between her and oneechan.

That alone was enough for me to forgive everything.
And by forgiving it all, it also signified that I didn't really give a damn, and that, to me, Medea-san was a genuine, tried and true, worthless existence.

But, even so, there's always something that comes to mind the moment a Demon I was acquainted with was annihilated.
I let out a small voice so no one would here, as I muttered in a daze.

"Medea-san… how unsightly."

Not even a dry laugh could escape my mouth. But at the same time, I felt that being dealt with before the conference started was quite suiting of Medea-san's way of life. To fulfill her role to the death, we have quite a pro here.
… Though that would only be if she did it on purpose.

This is the land of death. Places where Demons gather draw death close to them. When that gets t Demon Lord Level, then that's not even related to enemy or ally anymore.

Harming others came as simple to them as breathing. That's why even I'm hiding myself behind Heard-san…
She didn't get it at all. Even if she was a General class, her behavior full of openings made others want to test their powers on her. As a class even lower than her, I can only saugh scornfully at how ill prepared she was.

As I was simply staring at the scene from Heard-sans back, the sound of the clicking of a tongue entered my ear.

"Tsk…"

The Prideful Kaiser, Heard Lauder.
The Rank One Lord who had served the lone Demon Lord of Sloth lorded over the Demon Lord who remained collapsed over the table.
Before the Lord whose dislodged head had recovered itself at a moment's notice, his Pride showed not the slightest of waver. His eyes, as if they looking upon garbage, were far different from mine, but they gave more than enough verification that he was Pride all the same.

I'll bet there's a bit of his complex towards the great and powerful Leigie-sama mixed into that.
And every time I see that, I think.

That way of life… isn't it tiring?

A strong killing intent, as if those eyes alone were enough to bring all to ruin, lapped at the air of the conference room.

"Schitol, I believe I told you to stop."

"? Stop what?"

Face up on the table, the female Demon answered.

The army Heard-san lead in Leigie-sama's stead was said to boast the greatest fangs among all the Demon Lords.
With that sort of numerical power, the information did tend to gather around there, so I did have some recollection of the name Schitol.

Schitol Tzuchaser.

As a Demon of Avaritia, she held the moniker of the『Collector』. Her Rank was just one above Leigie-sama's current position, and Leigie-sama aside, she held the least land among those of the Great Demon King's army.
But that being the case, in what was supposed to be her first round table conference, she picked a fight with her senior Lord of Pride. I guess that's what makes a Demon Lord.
Of course, it was our first meeting, but seeing her nerve to stand before Heard-san, whose honed magic might even surpass the Great Demon King Kanon-san's, even if it may be pure recklessness out of ignorance, it was an act worthy of praise.

But that's all there was to it. She must be all bark, and no bite.
I mean Schitol-san… her appearance is decent, I guess, but her breasts are puny.

Schitol-san leisurely rose.
Her expression seemed to show true confusion, and her black eyes, with the gloss of obsidian, were directed at Heard-san.
With no anger for the one who personally crushed her head, her face was like that of a lost child. The purity of her expression made it all the more repulsing.
I doubt that was really the case, but her face seemed to seriously be wondering why it was that she had received an attack.

But that's all there was to it. She must be all talk.
I mean Schitol-san… her appearance isn't bad, but her breasts are much too pitiful.
As her size was just around the level of Medea-san, her worth as a person must be that of a single Medea Luxeliaheart at most. No doubt about it. A useless existence to me.

No need to think about it. The moment we met, with the form her desires made her take on, I was Overruling Schitol-san.

Heard-san furrowed his brow. A proof of his displeasure.
Despite this and that, while the Demon Lord known as Heard Lauder was powerful in

body, his mind wasn't as resolute. He was a warrior. It's likely that while Leigie-sama was asleep, he had spent his entire life on the battlefield. That devotion to his study that surpassed tens of thousands of years of experience definitely had an impact on his personality.

But his power was truly absurd. As Demon Lords, each and every one of them had a ridiculous amount of strength, but even among that, Heard-san was a cut above the rest.
He was a typical muscle head.

Since he abducted me without telling me anything under the pretense of training, I had always been watching that.
The word patience didn't exist in his dictionary. For whatever the reason, he had been overly sullen as of late, and his boiling point was getting exceedingly low. His pure physical strength that was, for argument's sake able to knock down a Lord of Sloth once, was, to Demon Lords that were no match in defense, definitely fatal.

But regardless of being crushed by Leigie-sama afterwards, his Pride didn't seem to have taken the slightest tumble.
To Heard Lauder, even if she was a former subordinate, the Envy Demon Medea-san was likely nothing but trash.
But to the Lord of Superbia, that wasn't enough of a reason for him not to eliminate the Demon Lord who didn't listen to his orders.

His words were the words of Pride. The words of god.
Unable to find satisfaction unless me made any Demon he met prostrate themselves before him, from my point of view, he simply looked like a narrow-minded man worried over all the finer details, but while I couldn't sympathize, I could understand.

As if to support the thoughts in my mind, without any warning, Heard-san's figure blurred for a moment.
At about the same time, Medea-san's body that had been left in the corner of my vision faded away as if it had been an illusion.

In the span of the blink of an eye, Schitol-san's head and limbs ruptured, and a bright red mist erupted out of her body. All that was left, an obsidian Soul Core the same shade as her eyes let out a dry sound as it rolled desolately across the round table.

His means of attack lay only in his fists. But his incomprehensible attach strength and speed gave off a power much too barbaric to be called Pride. I couldn't even follow the slightest of it with my eyes.
And those apart from me probably couldn't follow it either. I saw the Demon Lord who picked up Schitol-san's disembodied arms swallowing his spit.

He should have been a Demon Lord of Pride as well… now that he's seen those fists in action, the probability of him ever surpassing Heard-san has become close to zero.
How unsightly. If your heart loses, then there can never be pride. There's nothing but a slow destruction in store for him.

The old withered tree-like Lord sitting right across from Medea didn't seem to pay any mind to the ghastly spectacle, nor did he mind the wreckage of Schitol-san showering down on him. With a fed-up tone, he muttered.

"… Phantom Aliquot Dance… That girl… so she was a Luxuria Demon. A living illusion…

no wonder it ended so soon.”

“… Dammit Medea… when you’re the substitute for a Demon Lord, for you to send in a phantasm…”

Heard-san’s eyebrows were quite clearly stiff. It was as if his anger was clearly visible. How scary…
Demons Round was also a place for Demon Lords to demonstrate their power. As it is, Superbia already detested those who would taint their pride.

Especially when Medea-san was just a replacement.
Originally, that was Heard-san’s role… no, more than that, while she was attending in place of her own Lord Leigie-sama, for her to submit an illusion of all things, there should be a limit to tomfoolery.

I can do nothing but secretly praise her needlessly high amount of guts.

She really is just a precession of failures. She was ignored by Leigie-sama, beaten left and right by Heard-san, and even after surviving all of that, I could tell from a glance her new slovenly take on life. That girl must be a genius at tragedy.

“Kusu kusu kusu…”

And being thrown around like this by the Lords, how pitiful.
A laugh flows out of me. Just as its name might suggest, those of the Demon Lord Class were strong. If it was just in battle ability, then no matter how many of those of my level you grouped up, there’s no way we’d be able to oppose.
But in exchange for that, they were completely hopeless degenerates.

One of the seated Demon Lords sent his eyes over here.
The pressure I could feel just from that, enough to rock my soul, made my shrink back behind Heard-san.
My instincts informed me of the power gap that surpassed whatever enhancements I could gain with my Overrule Skill, however, it was likely something that, if I were given the time, I could close all too easily.
The only thing I was lacking in was time. Time for me to grow with the desires of my soul as fuel.

Heard-san made a slight gesture of peering over here, but he corrected his field of vision immediately.

Kusu kusu. Right, right. I’m just a weak little girl. If you hit me, I’m sure to die…

It appears that the situation was out of Kanon-sama’s expectations. She scowled a little as she stared at the position Medea-san had disappeared from, but she soon took a deep sigh.

“… Well, so be it. Lize, as his inspector, you will be informing the Lord of Sloth of this matter at a later date.”

“… Understood.”

Receiving the will of the Great Demon King, Leigie-sama’s observer Lize-san offered her affirmation. She wasn’t surrounded by a tense air, and she held an aura you could call grand as she stood upright behind the seat that had become vacant.

They had found common ground. Whatever the case, with Leigie-sama holed up in the Castle of Shadows, perhaps the safest place in the entire Demon World, a large majority of things were unrelated to him.
Continuing on, Kanon-sama's blood-red pair of eyes glared into the table, as if to pierce a hole into it.
At the one who should have received enough damage to return her body to just its Soul core, the Collecting Demon Lord.

I was swallowing my spit behind Heard, but neither Heard-san nor Kanon-san showed and disarray in their attitudes.
As if it was all a complete natural occurrence, they looked at the Demon Lord who had been reconstructed whole at some point in time.

"Schitol Tzuchaser… Then next time you lay your hands on an allied soldier, I will dispose of you in the name of my Ruin. Know your place."

"…? What place?"

Her conduct was as if nothing had happened at all.
Schitol-san's sharp gaze didn't seem to hold any care for the force that seemed to try to wither her away, as she returned to her seat.
The Pride Demon Lord who still had both his arms stolen tried to stand, but when Heard-san shot a look at him, he silently sat.

To regain control of the area, Kanon-san sent a silent glance around the table.
That burning pressure spread about to suppress the fighting spirit, the instincts, longings these Demon Lords had probed to their depths.
The Great Demon King position didn't have the qualifications of wisdom or status, or charisma, or talent. It was a spot that came to be by pure power alone, and that display was plenty to demonstrate that fact.

Of the Demon Lords allied to the Great Demon King, there is said to be nineteen in all. But less than half of that number had gathered here.

As if that shameful sight hadn't ever happened, Kanon-san offered her thanks to the Lords present.
That was the signal of the conference's start. A weak Demon Lord had no worth. In that sense, even if she may have been an illusion, for her to have been killed before the start, Medea-san had done an insufficient job of filling the role of Leigie-sama's representative.

"So we've all gathered… I thank you for making the journey here. Lords."

"… Hm, so this is all that's left. The numbers sure have dwindled."

Heard-san's head shook in lament.
The number of Demon Lords wasn't something that fluctuated so easily.
The race known as Demons was one without a set lifespan, and they get stronger the longer they've lived. At Demon Lord Level, their survivability was overwhelmingly higher than other Demons.

"The two that the Devourer, Zebul, ate, and Zebul herself make up a loss of three. The other casualties were Angels. Hm… for them to be annihilated by something on the

level of Angels… how deplorable.”

Heard-san sent around an intimidating glare to those present.
It was like he was offering to end them all before they faced defeat from such things.

Heard-san’s way of life was much too severe. I would never be able to imitate it, and I think it’s nothing but stupid.
So please don’t try dragging me into it. No, seriously.

“But we really have faced a considerable decline. It no one beyond Rank Ten is in attendance…”

The old man spoke.
His height wasn’t even half of Heard-san’s, and he was a Demon with a slim stature like a dead tree’s. His frailty made it look as if he would be sent flying with a breath of air.
But his glare held a viscous and sticky darkness.

The ranking system of the Great Demon King’s army wasn’t something based solely on strength.
While it was usually taken as an equivalent, the primary factor that influenced it was that Lord’s service to the army. That’s why compared to those below Rank Ten, the other Demon Lords simply lacked achievements.

They were young.

That doesn’t mean they had lived short lives, but that not too much time had passed since they became Demon Lords.
Fresh Meat.
Even so, it’s quite likely they had lived longer than me, and with that life, they were anniohilated by Angels. What a pointless life.

“Yes, this is Rank Eighteen here.”

“Yep~ Rank Eleven over here.”

“Ho ho ho, my apologies. It looks like not all of them have perished…”

Schitol-san raised her hand, and raised a high pitched, tension-less voice towards the empty seats.
Her lack of nervousness made me feel a little power seeping from my body.

“Hm… facing defeat at but a single Valkyrie, they’ve not the qualifications to be Demon Lords. They were fated to die a dog’s death eventually. There’s no need to pay it any mind.”

“Don’t be like that, Heard Lauder. This time’s enemy is… quite capable. The reason I’ve convened you all is also about that matter.”

On Heard-san’s words, Kanon-san let out a tired sigh.
The Great Demon King had an enemy too great to simply be called treacherous within her midst. Her anger scorched the heavens, and reduced the ground to ash. Always under such an extreme amount of stress, it was said to be only natural that she became the Great Demon King. As I thought, the Ranking system is nothing but garbage.

"Oh?"

Oh Kanon-san's words, Heard-san's eyes widened a little.
I noticed a faint fire burning in them.

The light of fighting spirit.

It was because Heard-san was Pride, that the stronger the enemy, the more likely he was to take the initiative.
It was in order to forge his own power, or so he called it, but I do believe that's a little extreme.
It was likely because he lost to Leigie-sama. I was forgiven as a result, so that's all fine and dandy, but that doesn't change how troublesome it is.

Once more, in silence, Kanon-sama looked over all the gathered faces, and spat out words backed by emotions violent enough to make existences quiver.

"A few days ago, at the hands of the Valkyrie in question… Serge Serenade, the Seventh Rank was destroyed."

"Seventh… Rank…"

It was the first death of a Demon Lord within the top ten.
Even when the death of a Demon Lord was a rare occurrence, it was even rarer for one of the higher ranks to perish.
On that note, the air in the conference room suddenly got heavier.
The old man opened his eyes wide, and scowled at Kanon-sama.

"Oh… Rank Seven… Ciel Afreide, was it? So the Haughty Youngun died…"

"… Hm, I see… it truly seems that she is sufficiently capable. Kanon, I shall approve of your anxiety."

I'd never met her before, but apparently Heard-san knew her.
Even so, why does his arrogance act up so much whenever Kanon-san is concerned? I've not the slightest.
I don't think there's a single merit to come of picking a fight with her, you know…

Standing behind me, Heard-san's one of Heard-san's inspectors let out a long sigh, as if he had become accustomed to the man's behavior.
The King in question has probably become accustom to dealing with his Pride as well. She ignored his dauntless wording, and moved on.

"Ciel Afreide was not a weak Lord. At the very least, no matter how many average Angels came at him at a time, he would never be at the risk of defeat."

A Demon's power was greatly chipped away in the Heavens where Angels lived.
But in exchange, our Demon Lords were transcendentally strong.

"And, what of it? Kanon-sama, all you're saying is that a single Demon Lord has died, correct?"

With a bored expression, the balloon-like man sitting beside Kanon-san tried asking.
His swelled ball-like large torso was enough to surpass Heard-san's height, and at a

conspicuously high level, his sorry excuse for a head sent down a look with its white eyes, and colorless pupils.

"Just as you may have heard from your inspectors, on this occasion, where one within the top ten ranks has been killed off, we cannot simply let her violence reign free any longer. It will be a hindrance to my world domination."

Kanon-san looked around again.
While she looked calm, the inside of the room was filled with a grilling heat, and even when she didn't look directly at me, I could feel it.

… World domination, is it?
I think that's just plain idiotic. For those out there, those fools out there, what point is there in gaining command of them?
If you're going to do something like that, then… right, just skimming the top of the broth sounds best. Get everything under your control, find a way to scoop out nothing but the beautiful substance, and leave the rest of the meal to the wolves.

Kusu kusu…

"Ah~… with the Seventh Rank being killed… does that mean I'm next~?"

Rather than… sitting in a chair, a young lady floating right above it raised a hysteric voice.
I secretly frowned, as I committed her form to memory.
Appearance-wise, she was a slim girl that didn't seem like much a Demon Lord at all. More than uncertain, her bearing was one where she swayed back and forth in the air.

Hers was an uncomposed voice I couldn't think of as coming from a Demon.

But she was one I had to be wary of.
I mean, even with that slim figure, how does her chest grow to that size…

Her pale-blue robe-like dress, and deep blue sash were, if memory serves, the traditional clothing of a peculiar province… it did fit the lines of her body quite well, but only her breasts swelled unnaturally from it.

As expected of a Demon Lord…

"There won't be a next. That's why we've been gathered. Right?"

"Yes, that's exactly right. Up to now, we let her run free, believing whoever died by her hand was fated to die off either way, but… now that Ciel has been slaughtered, we can no longer postpone the matter. We can't leave the Angels looking down on us like this…"

A gathering of Demon Lords wasn't anything that happened all too often.
While her calm composure wasn't thinkable of one governing Wrath, in truth, in her body, the Great Demon King was seething in rage.

Kanon-san was severe. What's more, she knew how to use that fact.

"We'll strike first. Other than that Valkyrie… I've also read the report of the skies showing strange movements. Right, Vanity?"

"… Yep."

A steel-like body apart from Heard's, wrapped around a mountainous build of a man roared out.
Vanity Seidthroan.
Next to Heard-san, the second strongest Demon of Pride.

Why are all these Prides these shameless masses of muscle…. It's quite wondrous. It isn't beautiful in the slightest.

Of course, that metal body over there is also out of the question.
Out. Of. The Question!

"Attacks… came twice. The enemy was five Angels, and ten the next. Our casualties… roughly one hundred."

With uninterested expressions, the surrounding Lords listened in.

The number of one hundred wasn't anything great, but it definitely wasn't small.
But it's not that we assembled a force, but that one of our forces was assaulted, and faced annihilation. An exception.
Among these Lords who gave their all to pursugin their desires, I doubt there's really anyone who understands the meaning of those words. All these Lords are idiots.

And Heard-san was the same as always. While he might have known, his lack of interest made his disposition even more ill-natured.
With his arms crossed, he lorded over Vanity-san with a grim expression.

"Hm, have you grown soft? Even if it may have been just a hundred, while you were there, for you to have failed to destroy a measly five Angels…"

"… No… my army's… the strongest."

Vanity-shot down the glare with a look that didn't fall short at all in terms of malice. There was no hesitation in him.
The class of wills between two Demons of Pride caused the air to shake.
As if to blow that away, Kanon-san let out a deep sigh.

"Please don't make this any more of a pain than it already is. Heard, Vanity… Vanity, I heard that the enemies were of Saint Lord Class, but is that true?"

"Saint Lord…"

That was heaven's finest. If Demon Lord was a Demon's highest rank, then that was what took its place in the Angel race.
And at the same time, they were a rare sight to find in the Demon World.
I've only ever heard of them, and never seen one for real. No, I doubt even a majority of Demon Lords have ever seen one.

But on the other hand, with the appearance of a Saint Lord, having only a mere one hundred casualties became strange.
They're supposed to be much higher up there than that Serge something something Valkyrie … and with but a hundred casualties, the Lord was able to repel them? Is Vanity's Legion strong?
I've always been going through bridal training in order to serve Leigie, so I'm none to

knowledgeable in that field.

Vanity-san gave his solemn consent.
With just that, the other Demon Lords began to stir. It sems they had finally begun to understand the abnormality of the situation.
The ones that didn't change were Vanity-san, Heard-san, and Kanon-san. Those three. Those were the only ones who had understood what was going on from the start.

The balloon man sitting beside Kanon-san flailed his arms about as he gave his opinion.
How unsightly. It's unsightly, but… that man's Rank Two. That means he was the former Rank One Demon Lord. This world must be at its end.

"So that means… there's a need for us to divide into two groups. What are your thoughts on the matter, Kanon-sama?"

"Right…"

Kanon-san had likely already reached her conclusion.
No, she likely had done so far before we had gathered.
This was just a dispatch order under the guise of a conference.

"I have no intent to mobilize us all. We still have the duty of crushing the Demon Lords of other territories. Right… two. Two is more than enough."

"The Angels… I'll destroy them."

With fiery sparkling silver eyes, Vanity-san's gaze pierced through Kanon-san.
That wasn't… Anger. But his voice like the rumbling of falling thunder definitely had some power behind it.
On that voice, Kanon-san grinned.

"Hu… so be it, Vanity. Swing about your powers as you please."

"Then on Serge's matter… I'll step forth."

Before another Demon Lord could open their mouth, Heard-san made a declaration.
He had a somewhat unpleasant expression on his face.
It seems both of them had wanted to take on the previous matter. I'm not sure if they were afraid of Heard-san, but Demon Lords had stopped coming to attack our lands altogether, as of late.
Even so, he decided to take the initiative, and go forth to crush his enemies one by one, but they were all too weak for him to feel any resistance, apparently.
The frustration from that is making my training more and more absurd, and I was just at my wit's end.

It's impossible, I tell you… to split a mountain with my bare hands…
But could it be that… I'm finally free? I want to return to Leigie-sama's side already…
I'm actually quite busy. I've no time to follow along with Heard-san's games.

Whether she understood his state or not, Kanon merely nodded once.

"Yes, Heard Lauder. If it's you, you'd definitely be able to handle it. Her station has already come to light."

"… You already know Serge's location?"

"Yeah, a Demon of Envy witnessed a scene of her battle. She's now but a caged bird to us."

"Hm… let it be so. At best, she'll make for a quick snack."

It didn't seem the other Lords had any opinions to share.
Of course. Those guys had no incentive. Orders were one thing, but they wouldn't choose to do something like opposing Kanon-san or Heard-san of their own volition.

Or so I thought, but the ghost girl went right into her fifty cents.

"Hey~ Heard-san. I don't really have a problem with you going for the Valkyrie or anything, but… if she attacks me, I can kill her, right?"

"Hm… I mind it not, Rank Six. If she had the power to bring ruin to Rank Seven, I can understand your sentiment of wanting to fight her."

Well I don't get it at all.

"… No, no, no, no, I just hate it when people like that get in my way, you know~?"

And the ghost girl didn't seem to get it either.
As if to say the conversation was unexpected, she crossed her arms. She needlessly emphasized her needlessly bulging chest.
How sly… as I thought, this woman is formidable.

"Are those Angels made of nice parts?"

"No clue."

On the other side, Schitol-san was, of all things, conversing with the Demon Lord whose arms she had stolen about some pointless topic, only to receive a flat out refusal.
How shameless… she really is the worst.

And what's with this lack of tension discussing out arch nemesis?
Well… just do whatever you want. The ones who'll pay for your unsightly display here is you guys after all…
In my eyes, I could clearly see the form of these Lords facing destruction at their oen negligence. You reap what you sow.

Kusu kusu…

How unsightly. They're taking everything in jest. Even if they may call themselves the rulers of Demon-kind, those gathered here are nothing but an extension of those third rate Demons scattered all over the place.
I can't… even take them into consideration. The one I want to prove myself to is one man alone. Only Leigie-sama. That is the starting point. If I don't get anywhere with that, my life won't find its beginning.

For a while, the surroundings were astir, and when a moment of silence finally came about, Vanity spoke up, as if he had just remembered something.

"… Ah, come to think of it… that Devourer… survived, you know?"

The thunderous voice clearly reached my ears.
The hustle and bustle that had been resounding through the room, as if taken by the tide, died down in an instant.

His voice was one thing, but his tone was one where he seemed to be giving a trifling report over something that didn't matter all too much.

But I did see it by chance.
Standing to the back right of Heard-san, I was in a place where I could pick it up.
That's why, I may have been the only one to notice it.

For a moment, just a slight moment, Vanity's eyes were colored in an eerie light.

Part 3: I Cannot Run Away

Hiero, you are… beyond help.

While those words lacked any clear killing intent, they were filled with a force that surpassed that.
They were definitely the words of a Lord of Demons, but they were on another level from that of the Lord of Sloth I had been watching up to that point.
No, rather than level… perhaps I should say type.

The difference between, without any stimulus, the large power that could always be sensed… the force of Sloth, and the heavy oppressing power of Pride to suppress everything.

Kusu kusu kusu, even when he was frozen as well, and had to be saved by Kanon-sama, he's acting way too high and mighty…

But I could never voice such a thing, and if I did, regardless of how high I thought myself over Heard-san, without even a moment to feel it, I would surely die.
It's no joke. My life doesn't exist for something like that.

But the reason I'm still alive is likely because Heard-san lost to Leigie-sama.
That's why Heard-san went against his own Pride, and refrained from killing me.

Without requesting a single armament, the Lord of Pride who took down the world with but his fists.
There are numerous cases where the source of one's Superbia comes from the 'self' a Demon had trained up, but in Heard-san's case, that wasn't nearly enough to explain it.

His was an abnormal, and overwhelming conceit.

But his gaze that looked down on this Underground was something that I, who went in the complete opposite side of Pride's spectrum, couldn't understand.

(TL: After so many chapters… they've finally… given a reading for Demon World… as Underground.)

That's why… I'd appreciate it if he stopped taking this out on me.

"Tsk… damn Egoist. What is he plotting…"

Heard-san's blade like glare was locked onto a wall.
It's probably that he wasn't doing that intentionally, but the pressure alone was enough to weight down my body. It wasn't that sort of weight of air type pressure, but rather a definite force of gravity.

Breathing became difficult. The inspectors keeping their distance from behind were looking at Heard-san with tired expression, and as if all of this was natural, they didn't say a word.
Their job was to keep tabs on this Demon Lord. At times, they assisted, and at times, they gave advice, but they were generally neutral entities. As long as it wasn't going to cause any real harm, they wouldn't say anything about this level of pressure. This level of self-control makes me commend their professionalism.

Well… even if a gathering of ten General Classes were to challenge him, Heard-san wouldn't even take the wave of a finger.

Perhaps the other Demon Lords finally collected themselves, as I was finally able to secretly take a breath of air in another's Zone.
It wasn't enough to prevent movement… but I was still in a bit of pain.

So the Devouring Lord, the former Fifth Rank Zebul Glaucus of Gula survived.
That fact stirred up the meeting quite a bit.

There wasn't a single Lord who knew not the Devourer's name.

And that wasn't a complement there.

If it was in the number of Demon Lords she'd killed, that woman likely numbered within the top three of the Great Demon King's army, and she was an incarnation of sin great enough to even swallow up this bleak and desolate Demon World. Of all else, the repulsive Demon even ate those of her same race.
She was likely more troublesome that a Valkyrie who wasn't doing anything but challenging Demon Lords, and much more abnormal.

If her continued existence was true, that is.

… I mean, she should have been destroyed by the Lord of Sloth.

"Kusu kusu kusu, but… seriously, after all this time, why is the Devouring Lord…"

Wrong. That wasn't the main problem. I knew that. And I also knew it wasn't something I should put to words.

The problem was that Leigie-sama had defied Kanon-san's words, and allowed the Devouring Lord to run free.
No, that likely wasn't the reality of the matter. Leigie-sama would never do something so troublesome. But from an outsider's perspective, how would it look…
Normally, it would be a failure more than deserving of punishment.

That was the important point here.

Even when I didn't voice it, I'll bet Heard-san guessed what I wanted to say.
He glared at me with strong eyes, and gave an answer as if it were nothing special.

"Hm… to Leigie of Sloth, Zebul merely wasn't even worthy of a finishing blow. That's all there is to it."

"I see…"

And I doubt there's any Lord here who would be satisfied with such an answer.
But, still, in this world, Rank and power was everything.
As long as the highest ranked Heard-san, and the one who stood above all, Kanon-san, didn't say anything, any more words would put the speaker's life at risk.

Just what was Vanity-san thinking when he suddenly proclaimed the Devourer's survival in an atmosphere like that?
I don't know his intent. Rank Four. His status likely wasn't a mere decoration.

But there was one thing my instincts told me when I saw his eyes.

Vanity-san… gave off a scent somewhat like mine.

Even if they were both Demons of Pride, he and Heard-san were water and oil.
Whether there was ill intent or not, the two of them were incompatible.

At that point, Lize-san started jogging in our direction.
Since the girl she had guided here had disappeared, she was probably free.

Lize-san was generally a straight-laced person, and while she was occasionally out of it, she was a woman of valor. Ah, also, her breasts were quite considerable.
She directed a single look at the several inspectors behind us, before turning to the one much greater than her, and in the worst of moods, Heard-san.

"Heard Lauder, what do you plan on doing?"

"Hm… a foolish question."

Using those words as a trigger, the vague mana emitted from his well trained body suddenly converged onto himself.
With just that action, I saw an illusion of the air around him warping.

Explosive magic.
Immense physical ability.
An unshakable will.

Having obtained all of those, his bearing was undoubtedly a Lord's.
Heard-san had no losses, and no retreats.
Without ever fading, his assurance in his 'self,' high as the skies, was always there.

And as I thought, as if it were a trifling matter, he offered a short sentence of answer.

"… I'll just destroy the Devourer."

The meaning behind those words was likely something Lize-san couldn't comprehend.
But as another Pride, I could feel them.

Even if it went against his nature…

"Why, at this point…"

"Hm…"

… It was merely his Pride.

That was the only basis for Heard-san's actions.
That was the reason for his strength. The meaning of his strength.
His longings wouldn't allow it. Even if it no longer held any relevance to him, Heard-san would wash away the stains on Leigie-sama's record.

It was a pain-in-the-ass way of life. But also a way all the same.

Lize-san hesitated for a moment, before posing a question.

"… Then what about the Valkyrie?"

"… The Devourer comes first. The Crimson Prison is close… and I doubt it will take much time at all."

"No time…? The enemy is the former Rank Five, Zebul Glaucus, correct?"

"Yes, what of it?"

There was never a waver in his way of life.
It was likely that Heard would never hold doubt in his own victory up to the moment before his death.

Kusu kusu kusu, he really has no flexibility….

"I'll head to the Crimson Prison."

"Eh? Wai… that land is under Vanity's domain. Are you sane?"

Heard-san didn't even nod at Lize-san's voice.
It was his resolution. Without listening to anyone else's words, he would push through his path on nothing but his own willpower.
How useless. When he's like this, he can't be stopped by anyone. In that sense, he was still quieter back when he was Leigie-sama's supreme commander.

Well, it doesn't really matter to me.

I don't need strength. I don't need training.
The 'supreme' that Heard-san wishes for holds absolutely no meaning to Leigie-sama.

To me as well.

If Heard-san is to die, then all that will happen is that I'll go back to serve under Leigie-sama. I still have something I have to accomplish there.

And wait, you don't have to die, just hurry up and release me already…
I seriously don't need this training. The land isn't splitting anytime soon. It's impossible. It's not splitting, and there's absolutely no one out there that wants it to split.

"Lize, you can just go scout out the Valkyrie's station. After destroying the Devouring Lord, I'll head there."

"Wai… it couldn't be that you're going alone, right? At the very least, your army…"

"Unnecessary… Hm, damn Vanity. I'll definitely make you pay for this one."

Oy, that one's a false claim. All Vanity did here was report the truth.
But he couldn't come out and say that due to his nature.
At the very least, I couldn't see that Vanity had that sort of disposition.
When I recall his boorish silver eyes looking our way, even I had shivers run down my spine.

His moniker… the Egoist means he himself acknowledged his own fault.

Vanity Seidthroan was apparently a Demon Lord who gave up on the King's throne. His disposition was far removed from prim and proper Superbia.
It's not my problem who dies where, and while Heard-san is messed up in the head, he's no idiot. He likely has several tens of times more experience than me, and he should have noticed it.

"It's quite definitely a trap, right…"

"Hm… trap… is it? Then I'll merely crush it head on."

As I thought, this is impossible.
I was sure he would say that…
This is why muscle heads are…

Heard-san has a large quantity of power, so perhaps it'll work out one way or another, but I'm considerably lower in that department. The Overrule Skill is powerful, but it doesn't have the ability to overturn a power gap too great.
But I've already given up on stopping this man long ago.

I stood a while staring at the inept inspectors standing about like scarecrows, before I made a smile and turned to Heard-san.
Smiles didn't work on him in a different way than Leigie-sama. However, it's more decent to make one than not… I think.

"Will you be heading straight for the Crimson Prison after this? In that case, I'll go return the flying dragon…"

The Crimson Prison was far. From the Palace of Rending Flames, it was a few hours, even with a dragon.
And in Heard-san's case, unbelievably, his own running pace was far faster than such a beast.
Then the dragon would just be in the way. Even so, the flying dragon was also his property, so we couldn't just leave it here, so it was inevitable that someone was needed to return it to Heard-san's base of operations, the『Castle of Shimmering

Souls』.

But on my polite proposal, Heard-san directed enough anger at me to make my body shrink back.

"Hm… Hiero. This is why I said you were beyond help.

"Hii… n-no… I was…"

It was merely a locking of eyes, but the weight I felt was physical enough, and I unintentionally retreated.

Wrong. That's wrong.
I-it's not like I didn't want to accompany you or anything…
No, you see, well, if you drag me along, there's the possibility I might kinda die, you know…

Those observers, who were really just there for show, looked at me with eyes of pity.
I don't need your sympathy.
Medea's unsightly exit floated vividly in the forefront of my mind.

But only her face had been altered.
What was there wasn't Medea-san's but…

A dull heat started welling up from the depths of my brain, joining up with my bloodstream.

And once more, Heard-san let out the words he had spoken just a year before when he abducted me.

"You are unworthy…of your Superbia."

His words were concise, but their meaning vanished as they were absorbed into me.

Lize-san let out some lines that were quite sensible in all regards.
She was a surprisingly hopeless person as she was, but she may have been the only sliver of conscience that existed around me.

"Heard, Hiero is a non-combatant, is she not…"

"Combatant or not isn't the problem. Hiero is much too lacking in Pride. This one is different from… Lorna."

I don't get just what exactly he's looking for.
But when a Demon Lord of Pride says such things, they hold quite a bit of weight.
Perhaps the reason I am unable to Overrule oneechan lies somewhere there. No, there's no doubt that it does.

It was merely a coincidence that Heard-san took to me.
But earning his sympathy must be my failure.
What he felt towards me was likely an illusion, but anyways, Heard-san's Pride was much too severe for me.

I have… no, we don't even have a way of life.

In the first place power… isn't even something I'm searching for.

But such excuses are rendered moot before this man.
No, just by stating my reason and will, I was unable to get him to recognize me. His annoyingly stern criterion had yet to be fulfilled.

"Lize, you are to take care of the flying dragon. Hiero… come with me. We're going to destroy the Devourer."

"… Kusu kusu kusu, there's no helping it… I'll follow you… yes, I'll follow."

I used all my effort to smooth the matter over, but the fatigue in my voice was so clear I could feel it the moment it escaped my mouth.

I don't know if there's anything for me, who can't split the ground with my bare hands, to do, but from Heard-san… I cannot escape.
While feeling that I was gradually heading in a completely different direction from my will, the image of Medea-san's departure grew stronger, and I prayed to the God of the Demon World, who all could say did not exist.

Part 4: Dear…

Heard-san's speed was extraordinary.

As it was, Deon Lords of Pride were said to be able to make the world around them their own, and contract it to their will, but even for that, this was just too much.
While I was using a flying dragon as my means of movement, his speed on the ground could only be expressed with the sentiment, 'ah, he disappeared.'
What's more, according to the individual himself, he could put that out even before becoming a Demon Lord. He's a monster, that one.

Of course, my Pride isn't weak, but if you were to compare our running speeds, then it would be as if I were in stasis. My Pride wasn't something that depended on strength, so there was no helping it.

Even when he told me to come with him, it seems he had no intent of waiting for me, so I frantically urged the dragon on. At a speed slower than Heard-san, but much greater than the norm, we headed towards the Crimson Prison, and by the time we reached, the sun had already set.

The temperature of the land ruled by Vanity was high. It's rumored to be the lingering influence of a Lord of Wrath who governed the area in times past, but the truth of the matter is yet to be determined.
Even if it was now night, the heat was incomparably higher than that on the Dark Prison Leigie-sama once controlled, and the unbearable heat made me let out a single fevered sigh.
I gratefully patted the neck of the flying dragon, who had put out a speed beyond his potential, and lay myself onto the ground for a while.

Still, this place is… really hot…

I lifted my arms to take in my own scent. I checked for dirt on my garments.
Keeping my appearance in order was part of the standard curriculum for the house in service to Leigie-sama. No matter how pained, or fatigued I may be; even on the brink of death, I could not let myself be dirtied.

I feel the anti-heat resistance on the standard Demon Tree gradually starting up.
Just what came to their minds to have them build a town at a place like this? I can only wonder.
If they were going to raise one, it would be best off in a place easier to live in… Like in the Dark Prison that never had any temperature fluctuations year round, day and night.

This town, which seemed to be called Grey Rock was only a few kilos from the Dark Prison… it was right across the horizon.
The information that it was a town that defined the border looked accurate. It was relatively close to both Heard-san's Castle of Shimmering Souls, and even Leigie-sama's Castle of Shadows.
And wait, I even passed it overhead. I felt a strong urge to stop by, so please praise me for not taking a detour here…

Well, I can't tell what Heard-san would say to me, you know?

I let out another deep sigh, and started walking through the town.
But even if it was night, it was still too quiet.
I was able to discern it from the skies, but the number of residents wasn't anything great. Is the Devouring Lord really at a place like this… no, there's also the possibility this is what's left from that Lord's dinner. I mean, the Devourer apparently eats other Demons for pleasure…

The moment I thought of the possibility, a chill ran through me, and I clutched my shoulders.

This is no joke.

According to Vanity-san, she was being quite well behaved, but he's not a trustworthy source of information. Our opponent has a bottomless stomach. There's no enemy I would like to take on less than a Demon of Gluttony.
Even if I was able to Overrule and nullify most of their Skills, I still doubt I'd have a chance of victory.

Well, from what I can tell by looking around, there are no traces of battle.
… Of course, there's the possibility that all the town's residents were devoured without being given the time to put up a fight, but if I thought that hard into it, I wouldn't be able to take any action at all.

Whatever the case, Heard-san should have arrived here long ago. No matter how ill-famed an enemy Zebul Glaucus was, she shouldn't be able to stand before him. Even if she were here, she was probably gone by now.

While I started forming my perfect theories on the matter, I strained my senses to feel for presences, and started walking down the path lit by the large red moon.
It was an ominous town. But I can't figure out the reason for the chills I'm experiencing.

Likely the town's namesake, the countless houses of grey stone gave off not a single sign of life, but still, some of their windows let off dim orange colored lights.
The only one walking about outside was me.

And there, I understood my discomfort.

It was too quiet. There was too little of anything.
As if white paint had been smeared all around me to paint out all the surroundings, it was an unnatural feeling of emptiness.
I wasn't particularly skilled at picking up presences or anything, but I should at least be able to feel Heard-san's. I mean, he never held any intentions of concealing that massive power of his.

I hurriedly looked around. The only one standing in the wide plaza of the town was… me.

But I couldn't tell that. Even if I strained my ears, or concentrated my eyes, there was nothing.
That truth caused my Soul Core to quietly shake.
I put my hand to my chest. The beating pulse I felt on my palm was all I could feel, and all that made my being.

I need to calm myself. Making a ruckus at a time like this is… the work of a small fry.
Dammit! This is why I didn't want to leave the Castle of Shadows!

I focused myself on the beating of my core, and encouraged myself, as I took a slow glance around.

"… Kusu kusu kusu, what could it be. This is… quite strange."

It wasn't that my life was in peril, or anything like that.
I'm not sure the reason, but I was feeling an immense sense of impatience. If reports are to be believed, then a Lord of Angels attacked this land before. Perhaps that's the cause of my unease.

The possibility that the unperceivable marks left by my natural enemy were ringing alarm bells in my head.

Anyways, my best course of action would be to meet up with Heard-san. If it's him, then whether it be a Saint Lord, or Devouring Lord, it will work out one way or another. And the reason I'm even here is also his fault, so it should be fine to have him take responsibility for this.

After I took a deep breath, I closed my eyes, and heightened my senses to a level I'd never felt before.
The negative soul beating within me stabilized. I have no Skill to take in everything around, like a Demon Lord's Abyss Zone.
But my perception should be wider than any of those dime-a-dozen Demons out there. Despite this and that, Heard-san's kidnapping/training did serve to strengthen me.

My five senses spread out into the surrounding air, and informed me of the world. My cold sweat fell to the ground in beads.

As if using that as a signal, I instantly started to grasp in the depths of my heart that I was indeed on hostile territory.
It was likely something like synesthesia. Not from my expanded five, but from a completely different sixth sense.

Sympathy.

Like I was gazing into a mirror, and uncanny world reflected my own form back at me.

This town had already served its purpose. The reason for its scarcity of inhabitants was likely that as well.
And it was likely… not by Heard-san's hand.
This is… right. A long time past. My sense of discomfort started to change.

"Hm… how useless…"

"Hyah!!?"

On the voice that suddenly resounded behind me, I unintentionally let out a shameful cry.
What entered my eyes was a man two heads higher than me.
Black hair, and black eyes. His overly arrogant expression was knit in obvious displeasure, enough to make my slight sentiment of wanting to meet up with him not too long ago flip over in an instant.

What was there was definitely the one whose reunion I had been hoping for, a certain Heard Lauder.
But even right before me, his presence was surprisingly faint, and if I took my eyes off him again, I bet I'd lose him again.

For how long has he been behind me?
The reason my perception doesn't catch anything likely isn't Heard-san's power.
It's this air. This magic, that seems to hang over like a mist to cloak any and everything.

On that air, as if an unknown fear had been eating at the base of my feet, caused me to raise my voice.

"W-what do you mean by useless? Heard-san?"

"… Tsk, damn Egoist… as always, he's a crafty one."

Heard-san didn't turn his eyes the slightest bit in my direction, and merely lorded over the completely empty space. He wore the same grimace as always, but there was a slight color of conviction on it.

… I wonder what this is about.

When I was about to call out again, the blank space Heard-san had been staring at for a while suddenly began to warp.
And as if attempting to muffle the scream I almost let out, a gloomy and broken voice shook the air.

"Don't… be like… that."

Vanity the Egoist. Even taller than Heard-san, the mountainous man raised a roar.
His disposition was like he had been watching us from that exact spot the entire time, as he calmly looked down at the both of us. Behind him were numerous Demons with their faces covered in black masks. Their heights and bearings were various, but the platoon of Demons had a strange sense of uniformity.

It wasn't… at some arbitrary point.
There was surely nothing there until a moment before. My eyesight isn't bad. There's no way I'd let pass an army of that size.

The abnormal situation made me begin to shiver.

It's… not an illusion. There may be a high-level Luxuria Skill to reproduce this phenomenon, but this wasn't something of that sort. Of all else, the power I felt from Vanity-san was definitely Superbia.
In that case, there's a high chance it's an ability of his subordinates, but for these numbers to be hiden away, it would be difficult for even a General.
Of course, Medea-san Class was out of the question. And she wasn't even Lust in the first place.

Heard-san was calm enough to make one think he had expected all of this.
He calmly spat out his words.

"So even after living a life long enough to erode at one's memory, you'll still favor underhanded tactic, Egoist?"

"… Call it… what you will, Prideful Kaiser."

He grinned.
The edges of Vanity-san's lips did indeed rise, but is that really a smile?

I raised my evaluation of Vanity-san a level. His appearance and contents didn't connect. A mismatch. He was much too mysterious. Despite his robust body, he went for roundabout methods.
For a Demon carrying the same sin as me, he remained unidentified. The unknown was the greatest enemy of Pride.

Vanity-san's and Heard-san's powers clashed.
Neither of them had moved a step. But I'm sure I felt their mana collide, and mingle.
Just by standing here, I can feel a wind enough to make my body cower.

"Where is the Devourer?"

"That girl… went to… the Lord of Sloth."

The Lord that governs Sloth.
Those words could only indicate a single place in this vast world.

Leigie Slaughterdolls. The world's strongest slacker, and the existence I was born in order to serve.
And at the same time, Heard-san's birth parent.
I haven't heard the specifics, but at the very least, the Lazy King held a great importance to Heard-san.

Did Vanity-san not know?

No, that's not it. There's no way that's it.
Otherwise… there's no way he could stand so calmly before Heard-san's blatant ill humor.

"… You… bastard… so you knew from the start!?"

"Of. Course."

A short sound rung through the air, and dust whirled into the air to accompany it.
I immediately closed my eyes to handle it.

"Wha… t…"

Vanity's large build had slid back several meters. His large hand that was perhaps the size of my face saw spread open in front of him.
The scraped off portions of the road revealed bright red soil.
From his upheld hand, smoke quietly started rising up the heavens.
Heard-san was glaring at him with eyes as if to shoot him dead.

I understood.

Heard-san had released his fist, and Vanity-san had blocked. That's all there was to it.
But that simple truth was enough to beat me down.

That can't be… there's someone out there that can stop the Prideful Kaiser, Heard Lauder's fist…

"You're also… the same… incredible power."

"What's your goal?"

I can't keep up with this.
Please don't start conversing with your fists. I don't understand that language.
His expression covered up with his audacity was simply quiet, and I couldn't comprehend the feelings he held behind it.

… Well, of course, I'm going to pretend to understand them…

I thought for a moment, before raising a cheerful voice.

"Heard-sann, Leigie-sama is undefeated."

The greatest monster I had ever met in my lifetime was not Heard-san, but Leigie-sama.
Heard-san was a monster in strength, but completely irrelevant to that, Leigie-sama's existence was incomprehensible. If I had to say, he was like a deity. Just his existence made me feel awe.
Even when I've only ever see him sleeping…

Since he'd already taken down Heard-san once, for argument's sake, I cannot think of a single one to win against Leigie-sama, and of course, the one who already faced an unsightly defeat at his hands, Zebul-san, is out of the question…

"Hm… I know."

"Of. Course."

Unexpectedly, both Heard-san and Vanity-san nodded as if that fact were natural.
I don't really get why everyone has such a high evaluation of that man when all he does is sleep, but it's likely that's just the way this world works.

Still, that makes the reason Vanity-san kept quiet about even harder to comprehend. There's not a single merit for him in luring Heard-san here.

At that moment, as if the Egotistic Lord had read my thoughts, he warped his mouth into what was, this time, undoubtedly a smile.
A hoarse voice. He included in some sarcastic mimicry towards a sincere tone, and what was there was clearly malice, and at the same time, his will.

His arm that likely had a width three times mine pointed up towards the sky.
His thunderous voice resounded through the unnaturally quiet town scape.

"Like I care about the Devourer… My enemy is… heaven. Alone."

As if it were waiting for those very words, a heavy wind blew.
The heavy deep-blue clouds covering up the sky split.

What remained was… a pure white light.
Countless strings of light poured through to sever the Demon World's red moon, and I witnessed a scene I could not believe.

Heard-san made a rare display of gritting his teeth into a sour expression… with eyes full of malice, he looked towards the sky.

"Vanity… bastard…"

"Fu…."

The light danced.
I could only watch it in a daze.

Angel.

The natural enemies of us Demons, and the souls that dwelled in the heavenly realm.
Clad in shining garments of pure white, with large wings sprouting from their backs… their Heavenly Wings caught the wind, and let them race through the open air.

Of course, even I've at least seen an Angel before.

But… the number was different.
Even as I watched, the sky continued to clear, and the whole story was made true.
A single cloud still hung, but it was clear enough. Their numbers weren't just a hundred or two.
I bit down on my quivering lip. As if a silk thread had been strung around my neck, my instincts began to suffocate me.

I had a clear understanding of it.
I was… scared of 'them.'

"Kusu kusu… why, at a place like this, so many Angels…"

The opposite entity from Demons.
I naturally put an arm over the other to hide my own trembling.
The spectacle I observed for the first time was truly deserving to be called a miracle of god.
The Angels were his vanguard. Unlike Demons, that would never remain bound to any single entity, they held on to the will of the heavens.

The will to bring ruin to all of us.

Standing at the front of such an army was an Angel with conspicuously more luxurious attire. While the others had a single pair of wings on their back, that lone Angel had two sets.
It was only for a moment, but those cold eyes without a fragment of self-consciousness, definitely captured us.

"…"

I could clearly see the difference in power. Regardless of how far apart we were in distance, it was more than clear enough to me.
Without a doubt, if she were a Demon, she would be Demon Lord Class.

There, I recalled the name Kanon-san had presented as the meeting's agenda.
The Valkyrie of the Silver Blue who acted to take down the Demon Lords all together.

"Could it be, that's… Serge Serenade…!?"

"Kuku…"

Vanity-san stifled his own laugh.
It was only the span of a blink that their eyes met. But to me, it felt like several minutes. My cold sweat shows no signs of stopping.

But as if to say that he didn't have interest in Serge anymore, he changed his field of vision.
To the horizon extending over the Dark Prison.
His mouth bent a little, and he formed up a slight grin.

"Heard-san, t-that is…"

I informed Heard-san, who continued to look up at the Angels with a grim expression.
At around the same time, Serge's heavenly wings flapped grandly.

It was a white light.
Displaying a sudden extreme acceleration, the Angel's body left a white afterimage in the sky as it disappeared. To accompany that, the other countless angels began to race through the sky without the slightest sound.

It wasn't towards us.
Not to Grey Rock, where two Demon Lords of Pride had gathered.
To the land that was once ruled by the Demon Lord of Sloth… to the Castle of Shadows.

"So this is… the reason you lured me out."

"My enemy… is… heaven. Alone."

Letting out something that sounded a little like an answer, Vanity-san raised his right hand.
From all over the town, from the shadows scattered here and there, numbers upon numbers of masked soldiers started to appear. It was as if they had just come to being at this moment, Vanity-san's presence-less Legion.
Adding on the ones who were there from the start, it was a considerable force. Even after seeing that number of Angels, their gestures showed not the least bit of unrest.

Vanity-san looked down at Heard-san. As if he were evaluating him.

"Kuku… Prideful Kaiser… go forth, if you must."

"… Tsk…"

If you were to compare Demons and Angel, the greatest differing trait would be mobility.
Heavenly Wings granted Angels air speed rivalling that of flying dragons. It was something an average Demon wouldn't be able to follow so easily.
Vanity's Legion was likely the same. Especially for high ranking Angels with experience on the battlefield like Serge, no normal Demon would be able to catch up.

But here, we had an extraordinary Demon.
The Lord of Pride, left behind by the passage of time.

The decision was instantaneous.
Heard-san's body blurred for a moment, before a kick jutted out at Vanity-san's bald head.
The ground shook greatly, and fragments scattered all over.
Blood danced around the air, and with a single wet sound, brown cuts of meat fell to the ground.
I grimaced at the terrible spectacle. I picked off a piece of meat stuck to my apron, and let it fall to the ground.

What was once Vanity-san was now left in ruin. With the attack against Schitol-san, her soul core still remained, but even that wasn't left within the wreckage. It was likely thoroughly smashed.

Perhaps they were at a loss for words, as Vanity-san's subordinates remained silent as they watched the blood.

I averted my face, waiting for the end of it.

I'm not sure what he was thinking, but… kusu kusu.
… It's because you tried to look down on our Heard-san…

He can't stand being made fun of. And I'm the same as Heard-san in that regard.
That's why it was natural for Vanity-san to die.

With a bored expression, the perpetrator of all of this trampled over the bloody mess, and said but two words.

"… We're going…"

"Yes. Will you be using the flying dragon?"

“No need.”

Of course. His feet are faster after all.
Stepping on the ground, Heard-san’s form vanished in an instant. Ah, he’s gone…
There really is such a thing as way too fast.

Well, if he’s not going to use it, I guess I will.
It’ll probably be impossible to catch up with those Angels on this dragon, But as long as Heard-san’s there, there will be no role for me even if I do end up catching up.

Then it would be more useful for me to simulate what to do, and how to appear on my reunion with Leigie-sama.

“Yes, yes, please move aside…”

I passed through the pitiful army that continued to stand frozen in silence, and headed for the flying dragon, as I thought to myself.
Oneechan, I wonder what you’re doing right around now… well, you’re probably the same as always, taking care of Leigie-sama… you’re probably carrying out the exact same routine you’ve been doing for the past few thousand years.

Dear Oneechan,

Yeah… it’s all gone to hell here, but know that I’m doing fine.
Please put in as much needless effort as you so desire.

I will, in you guys’ place, Overrule everything.

Chapter 5: Ira's Resentment

Part 1: How Sad it Must be

"Oh… what beautiful crimson hair… this child will surely become a fine wielder of Ira."

A large face with numerous wrinkles carved into it peered at me.
His height was twice my own, and it was likely that even if I squeezed out every ounce of mana in my body, my power wouldn't even reach his feet.

Among the ruling Demons, he was a being with supreme power. With awe in their voices, those around him referred to him as such…

『Demon Lord』

And even among them, this man's might made him a Demon Lord amongst Demon Lords.
He was a rare Great Demon King within this warring era, who even survived through the battles with heaven.

Fels Crowne.

His name was Fels Crowne, of『Deceit』.

He was a wire-like man.
His thin stature was likely not graced by anything like muscles, and he had a characteristically kind expression one would think to be unthinkable of Superbia.
But even so, Fels was a long-lived Demon Lord.

… Even if that glory was a thing of the past.

"Ira… if you have that power, than perhaps you'll even be able to unify the Demon World someday."

While making light of all the other Demon Lords, but that being a case, the King who sat at the summit for much too long was already tired.
Desire wasn't infinite. That's why, while we didn't originally possess lifespans, there are times when a longer life is the very reason for a decline in power.

He was severe, and vile, and merciless enough to earn the word『Deceit』in his name, and yet the one who had continued to pursue his desire all alone, the Lord Fels Crowne, was already dead.
Only because of his strong power, did he continue to sit on the Great Demon King's throne.

Meaning in the end, that was the extent of his caliber.
His lukewarm bearing was enough to make me bear resentment just by looking at him, and yet, he was always nothing but kind to me.
Enough to make my Wrath grow hazy.

It was a tale of a time in the distant past, but even now, it remains vivid in my memory.

I would intently gaze up at his stagnant eyes, and wait for the next words to escape

his mouth. And to me, the Great Demon King dropped to a severely dark tone.
The young me understood.
That was likely the reason an ordinary man like Fels was able to climb to the seat of Great Demon King.

"But this rate isn't going to work out… we require the power of Leigie of Sloth, I guess…"

"Leigie… of Sloth?"

Unable to comprehend Fels Crowne… father's words, I tilted my head, and he gave a grand nod, as if he had suddenly nodded off.
Only his silver pair of eyes continued to let off a dull light.

I'm not sure how much time had passed. Perhaps it was an instant, or perhaps there had been a space of several minutes of silence.
The Great Demon King slowly opened his mouth.

"Kanon. Henceforth… take up the name Ira Lord…"

"Ira… lawd?"

It was a name much too full of pride. I was a freshly born Demon, and I hadn't even gotten to Knight Class.
But Father seemed quite certain of it. That I was to become a Lord of Ira.

Deceit was an accumulation of fiction.
The nature of Fels Crowne was to remove what existed, and build existence out of nothing.
That's why me understanding the meaning of those words required the span of the next few thousand years.

Even if there are many who know my name, there are few who know its meaning.

The Castle of Shadows.
It was a palace, where even the shadows slept silently.
The ramparts that extended beyond the horizon was merely boorish, and its size rose great enough to befit the term, 'towering above.' The fortress of a Demon Lord.

The Lord of Sloth was to refer to a Demon Lord who forged himself in depravity.
This peerlessly vast Castle of Shadows was nothing more than that Lord's bedroom.

His subordinates, whose numbers surpassed the thousands, existed for nothing more than to protect his sleep.

Heard Lauder. Boasting a rare kind of power, he was a Pride Demon who would never prostrate himself before anyone.

"Hm… Kanon… Iralaude, is it? Useless… do what you will."

The strange Demons who held no higher directive than to attend to the ambitionless Lord.

"Kanon Iralaude… well, as long as you don't try to disturb his sleep, then…"

Acting on an incomprehensible principle, the way of life of these Demons I had no way of grasping was something I had never witnessed before, and they delivered a bit of an impact to my mentality, but that was blown away when I saw the Lord himself. Blown all away.

Even now, I can recall it clearly.
The quiet air covering the entire fortress, and the black door, an incarnation of darkness.

On the other side of the door I had opened to introduce myself, the Lord simply whispered to himself alone.

… I'm kinda tired…

He didn't seem to pay any mind to me, as I was taken up in silence, as the jet-black haired man directed his dead eyes towards vacant space.

The Lord of Sloth.
Leigie the Depraved. The sole Demon accepted to have pursued the foundation of Acedia to its limits, an ancient Demon.

As if he were the air, he lacked a distinct feel to him, but just by existing before my eyes, the vast amount of Magic you could even call absurd was clearly something extraordinary, even from the eyes of a fledgling like me, and he had much too less of a will.

It was such that even when I compared it to the preposterously high power of my father, I could quite distinctly tell that it was much, much higher.

At a single glance, I could tell by intuition.

Ah, so this is… the man who crushed a Great Demon King by merely being there.

No offense, or defense, but mere existence.
No charisma, or fighting spirit, or even intent, but power alone he possessed. If you call one who's thoroughly learned their Sin a Lord, then… yes, I see, he is surely worthy of being a Lord of Sloth.

There was status, and honor, and then, there was a gathering of Demons that showed no interest in either of the two.
Even I, having seen all the Demon Lords that came to kneel before father, found that lifestyle to be exceedingly rare, and it invited on my anger.
These Demons… just what are they searching for in life?
Even when, as Demons, they possess power great enough to warrant the envy of others.

The haves, and the have nots. Talent can be cruel. The gap between my father, whose wrinkles grew deeper with age, and the one who came on as youthful after living an even greater amount of rime was more than clear, and for some reason, it irritated me.

And my father that brought me here, with nothing but a worn-out expression, pleaded to that Lord with a single sentence.
To the Lord who, while he wasn't even doing anything, had an expression much more

worn-out than father.

Those words were, quite likely, not what a Great Demon King was to address to his subordinates.

"Leigie… I'll leave my daughter to you."

I didn't known the resolve or weight behind his words.
But the Lord of Sloth gave a response anyways.
He let only his face out from beneath the blankets, and the slovenly tone he answered in held no ambition. I couldn't see a fragment of the makings of a Lord in him.

"… Just do whatever you want. It's not like I'm the one who'll be attending to her anyways."

The compensation he paid for his power was… depravity.
A man adorned with the polar opposite of the anger that fueled Ira.
Change and stagnation. Perhaps precisely because they were opposites, that a principle exist in them to heighten one's Wrath.

Father likely saw through that.

While staring at Leigie's lifeless eyes, I frantically tried to think of the meaning behind father's will, and unable to think of anything, what entered my eyes as they turned up to father expectantly, were dark eyes of nihilism.
If another were to see his spiritless expression, they likely would have evaluated it as not falling short of the Lord of Sloth.
As young as I was, his speech delivered a considerable shock to me.

"Kanon… introduce yourself. He is the lone one to have spent his eternity in solitude. In this endlessly vast Demon world, the sole… Lazy King."

He pushed my back, and I took a step forward.
But I was still frantically thinking.
His recklessness. The intent of the aged Great Demon King.

Even before the Great Demon King, the eyes of the Lord who didn't pay any mind to it in the slightest, were horridly muddled.
And oddly enough, that was the vey answer to the question of, 'for what sake is he living?' I had thought the first moment I met him.
There was no meaning in this man's life. No goal. No reason.

His life that couldn't be worn by any other Demon Lord was the cruel meaning behind the solitude my father spoke of.

Just how sad a thing must it be?

That was the first time I felt an emotion opposite to resentment.

Just as father said, I lightly raised the edges of my skirt in the gesture that had been thoroughly beaten into me, and gave a polite bow.
I didn't feel anyone's eyes on me. Even while his pupils were directed ahead, this man wasn't looking at me.

He must be staring at whatever he does every day.

"Kanon Iralaude. The Sin I govern is Wrath. I'll be in your care, um…"

I hesitated for a moment.

Leigie-sama? No, as the daughter of the Great Demon King, it's unthinkable for me to use such an honorary title for another.
Leigie…san? That sounds too reserved. It doesn't settle right.
Should I just drop the honorific? No, he's someone father spoke up to this extent. He must be deserving of some respect.

Being left with him meant that we would be becoming family.
I already have a father. But let that be the case, there's no way this one's little brother material.

The hesitation was only an instant. With as much affection as I could muster, and, with Wrath backing my tone, I called that name… the pitiful name of the Lord o Depravity.

"… Leigie-niisama."

That was likely the starting point.
And I, in the long life that followed… in spending a timeframe much longer than that which tormented my father before me, I came to know the significance of the Lazy King's name.

But no matter how much time passed by, niisama was to stay as niisama.

And as if he were in hibernation, the way he would never leave the Castle of Shadows, was never to change.

Part 2: There Wasn't a Single Decent Person in my Army

"——sama, ——sama?"

My auditory sense received a jolt, and my consciousness was pulled together once more.

The voice I heard at regular intervals sounded quite nostalgic for some reason.

Light entered my field of vision.
I held my head, and let my eyes scan the area. It was the same place as always.

The throne room of the Palace of Rending Flames. While it held the same mold as that of the one in the Castle of Shadows, the Great Demon King's throne was soaked in a completely different atmosphere.
At that place where many Kings of History had entrusted themselves, I awakened.

"Kanon-sama? What seems to be the matter!?"

"… Yeah… don't worry about it. Just… I was just reminiscing a little bit."

'Twas a failure. It seems I had sunk too deep into thought.

"Y-yes… if that's all it is, then…"

The one looking at me with some doubt was my right hand Demon.
Lize Bloodcross. A Demon of Wrath like me, and a woman that somewhat reminded my of my past self.

Perhaps't that's why.
Of all things, I sent an inexperienced Lize to Leigie-niisama's side.
Perhaps when father left me to him long ago, he experienced a feeling like what I feel as well. There's no way to find out at this point.

The Lord of Sloth has no enemies. There's no way niisama, who doesn't even take any action, could bear animosity towards anyone.
Having power surpassing her age, the mildly unstable Lize was able to gain fine control over her emotions due to niisama's influence. Rather than stating it as a report on her progress, perhaps it is simply an inevitability.

Because niisama has quite a lot of experience…

"Good grief, those Demon Lords are the same as always."

"Yeah… but that can't be helped. It's precisely because they're like that."

I brought together the Demon Lords strong in Sin. It's natural for there to be a level of friction between them.
It's proof that the Great Demon Kings of old bent a large variety of powers to their whim.
And I'm the same.
I gathered together the wielders of all sorts of desire. I was more than prepared to be surrounded by potential traitors the moment I became Great Demon King.

Temperament. Wisdom. Brute force. Charisma.

The only thing those guys didn't heed was… authority.
And at the same time, with them following me to that extent… I can't have them lose their powers, and fall to some Angel, or the like.

"But… as I thought, Schitol went too far… to snatch from an allied soldier before my very eyes…"

"… Ah, Medea…"

It was only natural that a Greed Demon's power depended on material possessions. Therefore, their basic battle power wasn't all too high.
However, that Demon Lord had, of all things, chosen 'Bodies' as her target of desire. I haven't the slightest idea what caused her to develop such a craving, but the power she possessed could likely easily pierce a Demon Lord's body.
She was truly a troublesome Demon.
And there's that personality of hers…
All the Lords had quite picky personalities, but even among them, she was top class in being hard to handle.

Medea Luxeliaheart was a considerable Demon.
I never thought she would be thrown into the army when niisama randomly picked her up, and I hadn't the slightest notion that she would even reach General Class.
But even so, before Demon Lords, there was much too great a gap in quality.

"Looking at it from another perspective, could it be our luck that it ended with Medea alone…?"

"… Well, there's some truth to that… but it sure has been a while since a casualty came up at a conference."

Of course, if you mix together so many strong poisons, the damage to the surroundings is nothing small.
But at the same time, in this land swirling with various strong desires, they did hold the strength to show off their mettle, so it's not like they're to be killed off so easily.
If you want to look to the current trend, then most casualties don't arrive during the meeting, but from the aftermath, and it wasn't the Demon Lords themselves, but everyone around them.

"W-well, Medea was just a double, so…"

Lize let out a mournful sigh.
It must be painful to witness the Demon she dragged out be killed like that.

Truly, it may have been thoughtless to drag the girl over here.
I never should have compared her to Heard Lauder, who had always attended these conferences in niisama's place.
Medea and Heard's careers were different. Even if I was the one who ordered it, for her to have an insurance plan known as illusions… well, perhaps she was killed so easily due to the resultant negligence, but anyways, I should commend her for coming out in the first place.

I extinguished a cinder that as set alight in some corner of my head with a sigh.
To cover that up, I directed my eyes to Lize.

"As I've told you before, Lize, I'll leave the role of reporting to Leigie to you."

"Yes, understood."

Lize's figure as she gave her affirmation overlapped with my own form of the past, and for some reason, it gave me an excessively lonely feeling.
I shook my head to deny that. Such sentiment is unnecessary to my Wrath. Nothing will change from harboring such a feeling.

"But, Kanon-sama… whatever the case, I doubt there is anyone out there to target Leigei of Sloth."

"Oh… why is that?"

"I mean, for the Lord of Sloth… there's absolutely no reason to aim for his head, is there? Back when his territory was vast was one thing, but right now, Leigie Slaughterdolls has nothing but the Castle of Shadows… he doesn't even have an army. Attacking Leigie will not earn anyone any status or fame."

"… That's… right. Truly, by assaulting niisama, there's nothing to be gained."

But, still…
As long as he doesn't take any active action, as long as keeps his hand from the world, as long as he stays holed up in his room, can he truly isolate himself from all else?
Can he merely sleep peacefully without receiving any evaluation from anyone?

No.
Power is justice. Without doing anything, he spent his long lifetime, and like the sweet smell of a nepenthes, the vast power he cultivated would draw Demons to him.
Naturally, his obligations increase. That's something that can't be helped.

The ice he lowered on the world must have been a manifestation of the sentiment he was always been building up. How repulsing, and sorrowful.
Because of his very being, the Lord of Depravity is not permitted to gain a single thing in life.

Back in my own element, I gave more orders to Lize.

"Vanity's report is… also uncertain. A Lord of Angels, and Zebul the Devourer, even if this land is constantly astir with turmoil, the timing is much too convenient. What's more, that man isn't one to trust."

Vanity the Egoist's words were soaked in deceit.
Superbia was largely divided into two categories.
Those like Heard Lauder, who gained Pride in their own ability.
And those like Vanity Seidthroan, who boasted not of their power, and used wit to accomplish their pride.
That was Pride of the same type as father's.

"He's scheming something here."

As that man's daughter, I understood.
That sort of Demon Lord was the most dangerous factor to the King's seat.
I see, compared to all the others prostrated before me, that Lord is quite an irregular. I mean, I cannot see a clear form of desire in him.
But still, I didn't think that the man was telling a lie. High ranking Lords could generally see through most lies on the spot.

If he were to report a falsehood, what merit would be in it for Vanity? Even if he may be Rank four, he's not able to contest my Ira, and also, even if his report were to be a lie, that would just put Heard against him.

"… The truth of the matter aside, if the Devourer truly was defeated, yet managed to survive… then her destination will be niisama's side."

"…"

Long lived Demon Lords cared not for victory, but were stubborn in defeat.
Zebul Glaucus was known for her exceedingly high offensive power, and brutal nature. I'm not sure how long she's lived for, but I doubt she has much experience in failure.

I folded a leg atop the other above the cold throne.
I felt a burning power from my prided long staff clasped in my right hand. As if to manifest the submerged anger in the depths of my heart.
As if it were eagerly awaiting for me to release power through it once more.

"Hm… I don't think that niisama will lose, and… I can't think that Heard will let her escape either."

I mean, Zebul has already lost to niisama once.
No matter how heinous she may be, it would be difficult for her to oppose both niisama and Heard, with their exceedingly high powers.

"… Y-yes. Heard Lauder has already departed from this land. If it's that Lord, then perhaps there's no need to worry."

"What an impatient man… but so be it."

Even if there's no defeat to be found, I can't let such a trifling matter disturb niisama's sleep.
In that case, there would have been no reason for me to take his rank and land and army. Heard should know that fact as well.
Heard Lauder's power was undoubtedly top class within my army. I hated dealing with that man as a child, but when he's my subordinate, he makes himself quite useful. Especially how he could roam as he pleased in this wide world that was hard to span even on a dragon. His agility like that of a clap of thunder was that man's nature. It's almost impossible to run away from him.

The more and more I thought, the more sighs came from my mouth. If he'd only actually listen to my orders for once, I wonder just how much my Demon World unification plans would have hastened.

"Good grief, the world just turns about as it pleases."

And that will likely never end.
Even from the past… he was that sort of man.

Having spent many years alongside those niisamas of mine, they were my… bane.
If I became negligent, then even my desire would weather away.

A scene of a few thousand years past came up again, and I shook my head to rid myself of it.

"Well, fine. The main issue is that Valkyrie. Lize, I'll assign you the duty of informing Heard of what we have on her."

"… Yeah, he did leave before anything was said…"

Like that, just how does he plan on chasing after Serge…

Demon World unification is being held up by the existence of a single lone Valkyrie. How troublesome.
And sending representative to them rarely has any effect on those Demon Lords.

"But, even so, it's already the end."

In the end, there's but one opponent. Because of her mobility, we were having a problem getting our hands on her, but as long as we know her location, taking her out is all too easy.

This is the Demon world. A land of dark miasma governed by fiends.
The miracle of God, those heavenly wings cannot fly too far through this abyss.
We'll have to pound that fact into those foolish Angels.

"Right?"

"Yes, it is as you will it."

With intoxicated eyes, the man who was standing behind me immediately kneeled.
He was the inspector Demon dispatched to the late Rank Seven, Ciel Afreide.
While the Lord was killed, my eyes on him remained alive. No, that alone is part of the role of an observer.

It was the end of her luck when she chose a Demon Lord of Envy to assault.

The observer's intoxicated eyes, which would never stop envying all of existence, Angels included, had surely captured the Valkyrie's form.
An Envy Demon's nature was highly geared towards information. After being caught in the eyes of Envy, that girl was nothing more than a butterfly in a spider's web.

Lize furrowed her brow in a sort of wonder, and began timidly probing through my eyes.

"… So where is Serge of the Silver Blue…?"

"Ah, what a girl… silvery white hair, and cyan eyes, wings of pure light, and… her strength, everything about her was simply beautiful. How does that lass manage to live such a vivid life!? Kuku, it's a pity she's to be destroyed… and at the same time, what a wondrous day it is. That I can witness the death of such a beautiful Angel with these very eyes!"

His figure took on a form of joy, as if to express the ecstasy running through his entire body, and Lize's expression cramped up a little.
For her to make a disgusted expression at something of this level, is she not thrown about by her emotions a little too much?

Well, when you're by niisama's side, these sort of stimulus seem quite distant. Should I go dispatch her off to some repulsive Demon Lord for a time…
If this is enough to disturb her, she'll never be a Lord.

I prodded the man with my staff to return him to his senses.
Finally noticing the phrase, 'these very eyes,' and understanding their intent, Lize blinked a few times.

"… Report."

"Yes, that Valkyrie is, at present… racing about the skies over red soil. From the Crimson Prison to the Dark Prison… at the speed of the wind."

In this area, there's no land soaked in such black magic besides the Dark Prison.
With an Invidia Demon's『Envy Eye』Skill, it wasn't possible to find exact location,

but if we had the general idea, then the rest was simple.
If they enter a zone, then the Lord could likely tell their location. That white aura of theirs was like a splotch of white on a canvas painted black, and it really stood out.

"But it's the Crimson Prison… again."

The Crimson Prison.

Ruled by Vanity Seidthroan, a scorching wasteland.

That land wasn't an important strategic point in any way, and the population of Demons in it wasn't high. The army size was also standard.
It's not worthy of being the first land attacked by Angels in such a long time. I mean, their goal is to eliminate as many Demons as possible.

But as of late, problems have surfaced there one after another.

The appearance of a Saint Lord.
The appearance of Zebul.
And, now a report of Serge.

"Hmm…"

I thought back to the General Class Demon who stopped by the Palace of Rending Flames to give a report on the Angels just the other day.
While he was General Class, he was a seasoned veteran who had crossed many a battlefield.

『Abnormal』

That's what the man had said.
A Greed Demon given a reward was one of the few trustworthy entities in all of these lands.

Is this a coincidence?

Father… Fels Crowne was, rather than military arts, skilled in his insight. That was likely something that couldn't be avoided to carry out his Deceit.
That's why there must be some meaning behind this trend.
Father treated everything in his surroundings as part of his work, but to me alone, he was kind.
Even if that was just him considering profit and loss…

Should the Egoist be trusted or not?
Vanity does heed to my orders, but it's not like he's loyal or anything. From the start, his nature was opposed to devotion.
But the vanguard of God… those entities called Angels weren't ones who would let themselves be manipulated by any form of Demon so easily. Zebul was a monster who could have eaten the man the moment they met.
Even if someone was plotting something, it would be too much a risk for the Egoist to play his hand.

Heard Lauder is strong.
But against two opponents, the Devourer and the Valkyrie, can he possibly come out victorious?

It's unlikely that he'll encounter them simultaneously, but his power should fall the more he uses it up. That doesn't change regardless of how much of it he's stored up.

Heard was niisama's formed right hand man. It's an impossible notion, but in the million to one chance he's destroyed, niisama might actually be saddened. At that time, I'll have to be prepared for the entire Demon World to be frozen over again.
So perhaps I should send in some reinforcements.

『Always foresee the worst outcome. Reality will always exceed that.』

Father's teachings floated up in my head.

But even if I were to send backup, the Rank Two and Rank Three Demon Lords bear resentment against Heard Lauder, and the chances are higher that he'll actually suffer an attack from behind.
Since Zebul was removed, Rank Five has yet to be filled, and with his nature, Rank Six is unlikely to even hear out my orders.
As the Great Demon King, I can't have myself go out personally.

There wasn't a single decent person in my army.

"? What seems to be the matter?"
"Hmm… no, I was just considering whether to play another card or not."

"To send reinforcements? Is Heard Lauder insufficient for the task?"

Lize's question was on the mark.
Even back when he was a General, Heard boasted exceptional power, but that was brought even further to the limit when he became a Lord. If it's that man, then perhaps he could even rend the earth with his bare hands.
I'm sure he's the greatest master in my army. If you think about it logically reinforcements would be unnecessary.

My dispatches to the Demon Lords haven't been recalled, and if I sent out those numerous ones below General Class to a fight between Lord Class entities, they'd be there for no purpose but to make noise.

I scrutinize over the incessant notions passing through my head, and reached a conclusion.
… I'm being a little… too cautious.
I've not the leisure to leave my own subordinates on standby.

At that point, Lize furrowed her brow, and muttered.

"But… truly, even if Heard is not to face defeat… there's the possibility he might let them slip past. Once they've entered the Dark Prison's territory, the Castle of Shadows isn't too far away…"

Castle of Shadows… niisama?
… Right, if they've already entered that land, then with Heavenly Wings, the Castle was but a stone's throw away.
But just because she entered the Dark Prison, that doesn't mean that Serge is set to head for the Castle of Shadows.

I decided.

“Lize, prepare a Dragon. We’re off to the Dark Prison.”

“… Huh? Wai… Kanon-sama, you’re going out personally?”

There’s no time.
The Palace of Rending Flames, the Castle of Shadows, and the land of the Crimson Prison were lined up in a straight path. If I set out immediately, there’s a chance I’ll arrive in time.
I glared at Lize, who remained in a daze.

“Exactly. Now on with it!”

“Y-yes! Understood!”

I gripped my staff strongly, and stood up.
In times beyond memory, when there was nothing but darkness in this desolate world, the Dark God was said to have passed this instrument to the Great Demon King. With my desire as its fuel, it gave out a steady pulse like a heart.
The feelings that came with my impatience circulated around my veins. Like the starting of an engine, heat began to spread through my body.

Valkyrie… Valkyrie, is it?
To stand before me, before niisama, how reckless must she be?
To try to slay Leigie of Sloth after killing off a measly Demon Lord or two is simply outrageous.

Well, well, well, I guess there’s no helping him.
I, Kanon will protect your peaceful rest, dear niisama.

Part 3: I am a Coward

Rage up, my flame.
My resentment shall birth dark flames greater than the cauldrons of hell, to do the Devil’s work of reducing the universe to ash.
You unsightly insects fluttering about the skies, before my ambition, you hindrances are all no greater than flies.

The heavens that looked down on the red blazing sun were simply high, and a realm beyond the reach from us beings forced to crawl along the ground.
But that’s how it should be. That’s why it’s perfect.

To us, wings are… unnecessary.

We don’t need those white bonds that tied us down to some inept God.
This lightless soil is the land we shall rule.

“You all will learn the meaning of that soon enough.”

I’ll have them regret setting foot here in jest. I’ll carve it into those bodies, those

wings.
Otherwise… I won't be able to feel satisfied.

A flying dragon's wings ranked equal to those of an Angel's in speed.
Boasting the greatest influence across these lands, my steed was faster than any ordinary dragon you'd find out there.
Because of the wind, there was quite a bit of turbulence atop the dragon. From up here, sitting on the gliding beast, that was letting off rough breaths from its nose in excitement, the boundary that marked the territory of Heaven felt horribly close.
What my ancestors… no, what me and my ancestos yearned for, a world of light.

It's not that I don't understand that sentiment.

This faint malaise I feel in my soul core, simply by looking up at the sky. That was probably… aspiration.
Even when it's been less than ten thousand years since I first came to be, I could feel it. For those Demon Lords of old, forced to look up at it for hundreds of thousands of years, their yearning must be much greater than I.
But at present, I held no interest in such a thing.

There's no guarantee that dazzling light is capable of bringing about any change to us. Just as it's not certain our darkness will drop one to depravity.
I knew that all too well.

That's why, it's likely that even if some Great Demon King of old had managed to subjugate that world up there, I doubt anything would have changed.

Sitting aboard a flying dragon a little smaller than the oversized one I took as a steed, Lize sat with a grim expression as she flew to my lower left.
It's been several of tens of minutes since we first entered the Dark Prison.
In this land constantly bathed by silence, while there still wasn't a touch of sound, there was an unrest the likes of which the land had yet to see before.

It wasn't by much, but niisama's perception from his『Abyss Zone』was vaster than mine.
My zone was currently encompassing approximately three fourths of the Dark Prison's vast land. I probed through the contents of that without leaving a stone unturned.
Through concentrating on all the faint traces of information I picked up, my head began to hurt.

But I can tell. I can see it clearly.
The presences of all shapes and sizes gathered around this land.

Apart from the countless irritating forces adorning the sky, there were three large powers. By size, there was no doubt they were Demon Lord Class, and for three powers of that extent to be in such close proximity was usually something that never came to be.

One of them was definitely clad in light. With the presence tracing the sky, and the flock following its lead, an overwhelming amount of divinity was being released.
Even if this isn't heaven, that would be quite a debilitating factor.

The other two were ones I knew.

Two simple ones faithful to their sinful desire. At the summit of the Demons that governed the Demon World, two Lords of Demons.

『The Prideful Kaiser』, Heard Lauder.
『The Devourer』, Zebul Glaucus.

They were the presences of two Lords top class in this Demon world.
With those two presences at the center, the air sunk. Just by being there, their massive souls caused the world to creak and grate.
Strangely enough, both of them were specialized in attack, and their power transcended that of the other Demon Lords. In this den of beasts and monsters, their power that didn't permit pursuit was much greater than any of the divinity coming down from above.

The level of power of Angels and Demons were decided by the souls embedded in their bodies.
With Heard and Zebul, the gap between them and the Angel was close to double.
While it's not like the quantity of power directly correlates with battle ability, that gap wasn't something to be overturned so easily.

Heard might be able to settle this with one hand.
Then was my anxiety unfounded?

Definitely… not.

The fact I can sense them means that they can sense my location as well.
Heard was a given. Also Zebul, and likely, the enemy Angel.

On all those forces swarming towards the Castle of Shadows like moths to a flame, I remembered a scalding crimson emotion, which I frantically clenched my teeth to contain.

"They've stepped a little too far out of line… of all things, to set foot in the Dark Prison…"

Lize's prediction was correct.
The Angel's destination was undoubtedly the Castle of Shadows.

I felt that my own decision wasn't wrong.
There would be nothing I could do if I sent a representative, and they were to fail.

The Castle of Shadows was the Lord of Sloths bedroom, and his coffin.
I won't allow a single one to set foot in there.

I remembered niisama's eyes when I last saw him a year ago. All he wished for was a quiet rest.

"We sure are… foolish…"

As ones with power, we cannot help but attract stronger ones to us.

When I think of such a trifle disturbing niisama's rest, along with a helpless feeling, I felt the sensation of my gut being burned through weighing me down. It was an emotion I'm sure I'd learned to control before.

The flying dragon raised a low voice, and tis body swayed greatly. On the smell of something burning, I finally noticed that my own Ira was inflicting damage onto my steed.
With that small voice I hear below me compared to the beast's large build, I can't help but find it quite lovable.

… This is no good. At this rate, I'll break into a smile again.

I took a deep breath. Little by little, I sink my Wrath back down to the depths of my existence.
Level-headed anger. Sharm rage, honed like a blade.

I already knew all the ways to swallow my anger.

I licked my lips. The beat has already quieted down. But it's not like my resentment had disappeared.

It was merely left without eyes. It was constantly burning up my soul. All the parts of it I didn't show on the surface were merely sharpening themselves. In order to bring ruin to my enemies.

We got closer to the battlefield, and the information I picked up grew more vivid.

There, was a scene that raised my concern.

"Tsk… Heard… just what's holding him up."

As if to show himself off, I witnessed a pulsating black flash… The wave of darkness that resulted from a clashing of mana spread across the sky like an aurora.
The mass of power came into contact with the other mass, and gave off an intense flicker like stardust. But there was no sign of either light going out.

The spectacle I could even see from a distant sky felt something like a premonition of the end of the world.

The devourer, Zebul Glaucus.
Blessed with an endless hunger, a witch of Gluttony.
She was conspicuously atrocious, and conspicuously sinful, even among the Demon Lords. All to devour all creation.

Even that Heard Leader won't be able to knock down that perpetually lived gifted child of starvation.
Or maybe he's just playing with her…

To blow away the gloomy feelings sticking to my head, I scoffed.
But that didn't clear away any of my inner resentment in the slightest.

"Hmm… just do whatever you want. I've no intent to rid myself of either of you two. Go at it as you will."

Annoying. It's annoying, but… otherwise, there would be no point in me coming here.

If you were to look at Heard Lauder in terms of simple power, then he would be within the top three of all Lords.
It's not like I conceded Rank One to him simply because he was an old friend.

Direct physical strength.
Absolute confidence in himself to lord over all.
Those were the qualities of Pride. He more than accomplished his own Sin.
I've no doubt in his victory. Even if it were to take a bit of time.

Even if I didn't really like him all that much, I had at least that level of trust in him.

But still, the current situation is a little too rowdy.
Far behind Heard, there was an army of around five hundred racing over the land.

To chase the sky-bound Angels, a Legion atop flightless dragons was rushing over.
While kicking the ground at a speed that didn't fall behind those of the Angels' wings, the ominous army that seemed uniform enough to gain a constant measurement with a meter stick was one belonging to Vanity.

I'm not sure if they were even focused on the Angel flock, as without even a sign of them using a Skill, they quietly continued their dash. Their presences were exceedingly light, and for some reason, they brought about a psychologically unpleasant feeling with them.

Lize let her shoulders tremble.

"As always, that's a repulsing army he keeps."

The army with such a fleeting feel to it was a rare one among the Demon Lords' forces, which had been given a specific name.
Vanity himself had tacked it onto them, the『Ravus Persona』.

Even from this distance, the lost individuality and colorless grey souls I felt may be the origin of the name.
It's not like there was a gap of power between that army's Demons and others, but their somewhat ominous atmosphere made it so even I couldn't tell for what purpose they had come into being.

Originally, I should have been analyzing the Angels. But rather than them, I found myself naturally concentrating on the army trampling the ground.
Quite different from than those holy messengers, who were irritating from their nature opposing ours, it was that army's lack of nature in its entirety that made them all so irritating.

In that Legion advancing over the wasteland, the presence of their Lord Vanity was… absent.
I can't feel him anywhere in the extent of my perception. Within my Zone, there are but three existences of Demon Lord Class apart from myself.

Was he annihilated? No, even like that, he's Rank Four… he's not of the caliber to go down so easy. Even if he were up against a Lord of Angels, he should have held out no matter the case…

There are too few characters on this stage. It's a strangely ominous sensation.
I can't think that Vanity's army would act without its master.

At the conference, he clearly declared that he would bring death to the Angels.
At this point, I'm even beginning to doubt those words of his. The warning I heard

from my father long ago threw my analysis of the situation out of line.

In the first place, no matter what sort of army it may be, there's no way that Demons could pull off such coordinated movements with no one leading them.

My thoughts, stuck in a ditch, were snapped back with a thunderous sound.

Now's not the time to think of such things, I see.
By taking a deep breath, I calmed myself down.

An army of Angels. And army of Demons.
Zebul Glaucus. Heard Lauder. Serge Serenade…
And Kanon Iralaude.

It's quite an extravagant lineup we have there, but to Leigie-niisama, we're at quite a disadvantage.

No matter how strong he may be, Heard Lauder's but a single Demon. What's more, of all things, that lone Demon was up against another Demon Lord who should be part of my own army.

Without their master, Vanity Seidthroan, that army was… a meaningless gathering.
While five hundred was nothing to scoff at, that level would find taking anyone of Demon Lord Class on to be difficult.
A low ranking Demon Lord may be one thing, but to one who took down the Rank Seven, they won't even be a hindrance to Serge.
A Lord for a Lord. Those were the bare bones of anti-Demon, and anti-Angel tactics.
God dammit, if only Vanity was here, I'm sure it would work itself out one way or another.

Racing like shooting stars above the ether, the Angel forces weren't all too high in power, but they were numerous, and anyways, they were fast.
The number of them Vanity reported was ten, but this time, their forces pretty much equal the man's army. I'm surprised they managed to get such a large army to infiltrate this place without triggering a single Lord's zone. A strange smile started to come across my face.

The heat I should have kept confined started singing my thoughts.

Are we unlucky, or incapable? The enemy's numbers are beyond expectations. We've too little hands here.
For all the enemies I imagined to be gathered here…

Just like Demons, Angels were few in number. A few of them was one thing, but it's been a few thousand years since several hundred of them appeared at once. However, my urge for battle wasn't worked up at all.
I had no physical enhancements born from the urge to do battle. All that was in me was simple impatience.

No matter how many Saint Lord Class Angels unify themselves, this scale isn't going to make the Demon World fall. Rather than that, if we had an honest clash of power, it'd all be settled in an hour. It's just a way to pile up corpses. These guys are merely needless casualties.

It’s a perfect form of harassment, mind you.
This is all just an inconvenience.

Perhaps I should have taken along another Lord.
First of all, defeat ain’t happening here, but there’s a chance of letting them escape. Once they’ve gotten away, it would be difficult to give chase.

The main point Angels overlooked Demons in was their speed.
Hard to catch even aboard a mount, the flight of an Angel’s wings was of the highest speed, and with their stamina, Demons were no match.

If there’s something out there called fate, then I can’t just spend my life placing curses on it.

Power naturally flowed to my hand, and my nails sunk into my upper arm.

Why.
Why do they head for the Castle of Shadows?
To the side of the Lord who without accomplishing a single thing, spent his peaceful time in a deep slumber.
An abyss of sorrow. Always clad in a deep and dark sea of gloom, the most sorrowful existence of this world.

Even if you look upon him as one with power, I could only see it as saw.
And at the same time, I was certain.
If that’s the burden my niisama is to carry, then it must be my role to assist him.

I smiled at my own cowardice.

Fine… it’s something I knew from times long passed.
This world will make a fool of me.

Inconvenient? Too numerous? Absurd.
Fine. I’ll swear it here.

“With my name Iralaude on the line, I’ll leave not a single one of you all alive.”

From far away, along with the sound of the collapse of a mountain, a large fissure emerged in the earth.

Right over the horizon, I finally got a view of the battlefield.
The numerous holes dotting the ground and as if lines had been drawn in, the countless cracks.
In the center of that stood the arrogant Heard Lauder, and a Demon of small build, with black miasma circulating all over her body… Zebul Glaucus’s miniscule form.

The ground rumbled, as if trembling before them. Lize’s face was colored with fright and surprise as she strongly gripped her reigns.
For a brief moment, Heard Lauder’s mana swelled up. But with just that, it felt like a normal Demon would be rendered unconscious.

So she’s an opponent he has to let out that much power to defeat. I didn’t think I would arrive in time to actually witness Zebul’s destruction.
With that much force going around, there’s no way he isn’t serious.

The wind that blew across this land was violated with a thick magic, to suck in each and every desire.
This was the wind of a battlefield.
Birthed by the clash of desire, a wind of chaos.

As if it were actually suffering wounds, the mana that soaked into the Dark Prison… niisama's zone was torn asunder.

While it was cut through a couple of times, it's not as if the Zone itself was effected as a whole.
But that truth was irrelevant to me.

Those that get in my way… be they Demons or Angels, or Valkyries, they're my enemy.

Finally capturing the battle scene in her pupils, Lize opened her eyes wide.

"Absurd… what… power… They're equal? No, Heard has the advantage, I see."

There was affinity between Demons.
With high offensive power, it's quite rare that a clash of Pride and Gluttony would turn into a drawn out battle.
Affinity-wise, Pride was the stronger of the two, but the gap was not a great one.

Lize's discernment was correct. Given the time, it would likely be Heard's victory.
But there's no longer the time to wait for such a thing.

I cannot match the speed of those heavenly wings. No matter how proficient a dragon I ride, I cannot overturn that biological deficiency.
While I looked one, I could do nothing but measure the velocity of the encroaching Angels. That was the pure physiological difference between the Angel and Demon race.
If there was a single Demon out there to oppose it, then it would be the Superbia Demon who saw time as stagnant.

And that truth was likely what dulled Heard's fists.
The malice the man released wasn't only directed at the enemy before him.
Heard was a battle maniac, but he was also once niisama's follower.
While he once waved a banner of rebellion, I don't see his devotion weakening at present.

Battles between Demon Lords were where desires ate into one another. Each and every blow exchanged was potentially fatal, and the Lords put their very existences behind each and every one of those blows.
Zebul's life was too powerful to be taken down so simply, even with Heard's unfollowable speed.
She wasn't an opponent that could be defeated merely by finding a gap in her defense.

On the other side, the holy flock was, to their natural archnemeses… to the Legion marching along the land, and to the large-scale destruction raised by the warring Demon Lords, they showed no signs of even paying the slightest attention. With what one could call pure honesty, they headed at full speed towards the Castle.
Their powers weren't as high as I had heard. While there surely was a Saint Lord

Class there, if you were to ask whether she would be capable of destroying Rank Seven, I would be left in doubt.
But that doesn't change that it'll become a pain if I let her off here. At the very least, it wasn't a level of power those middle class Demons at the castle like Lorna or Medea would be able to deal with.

Me revoking his army in order to protect his silence backfired on me.
Leigie of Sloth lacked high offensive power, or dexterity, but his defense and vitality alone were extraordinary. That's why even if he were hit around left and right, he wouldn't die too easily, but that Angel's actions weigh heavy on my mind.
She bore an undaunted will, as if she had some sort of scheme to surpass Leigie-niisama's needlessly high defensive ability.

With the million to one, billion to one chance that he'll be killed in mind, I cannot let her pass.
Even if that wasn't the case…

"… I shall not let her disturb his sleep."

"…"

The distance between us was but a few kilometers. But as if to avoid us, the flock had altered its path.

My luck lay in my Palace's location in relation to the castle of Shadows, making it so they were forced to head in my direction. If that had not been the case, then I wouldn't even be able to confront them.
My misfortune was in that my Wrath was mainly of Skills for single targeting use. With five hundred on their side… that's a little high to capture them all.

Burn up their souls. Converge my entire being on my desire to further hone my blade.

One of my unconsciously clenched teeth snapped, and fresh blood scalded the back of my dragon. From its mouth, a small groan was audible.
I wiped it off with my sleeve.

Perhaps too much blood had rushed to my head. My footing was unstable.
Even so, while swaying, I stood upright on the dragon's back, and silently held my staff in front.

It was the greatest treasure of the Demon Race, a gift handed down from the Evil God to the very first Great Demon King. Its height was about a meter and a half. The lumber that formed its main body was tougher than any material found in this Demon World, and its tip was garnished with an ornament made in the like of a beast's jaw.

(TL: Its height is given as 5 Shaku, which converts to 1.515 (repeating) meters)

The inscription on it read, The Emperor of Destruction's Staff, Weydhe. Among the countless treasure littered around the world, it was an item with the opposite nature of a holy relic, a treasure of the Evil God.

Within the reptilian jaw was inlaid a golden crystalline eye to direct at mine enemies.
The reflective surface of the finely cut jewel caught the sunlight to give an ominous shine.

Ira was the manifestation of violent emotion.
A heartless sin to burn away all other sentiment.

I took a deep breath. I let out the resentment I had been building up all these years.
Right now, I'm likely making an expression I would never display to another.

My vision is died a bright red, and viscous fury swept over my mind.
But still, I could remain calm. That was what Leigie-niisama taught me.

It's what he sacrificed his body to teach me.

Anger isn't something to release so recklessly. It's something to control, and hone.
I give a short incantation. What dyed all I saw in red was channeled through my prized possession into the sky.

"『Wrath Drive』"

Countless crimson lights raced across the air.
At the speed of light, those crimson comets burned up the sky, and in the next instant, they had reached their targets. They pierced through the Angel flock from the side, and continued to go through one body after the other.
Like scraps of paper, the divine robes were bore through. No sort of defensive wall holds any meaning before me.
Several dozens of Angels were instantly reduced to nothing, leaving not but faint afterimages in the air.

I heard the ominous sound of something breaking resound through my skull.
An impact to my taste buds, the flavor of iron. I completely ignored the pain I felt, and clicked my tongue.

Having been pierced through, the Angels were halted for but a moment, before restarting their flight once more. That gesture made it feel as if they were following a set program, and there was barely any lag. An army prepared for death.

I subconsciously spat out my crushed tooth.

While I had not experienced the wars of old, I knew enough about those beings called Angels. At least, I thought I had known.
They are our sworn foe, and brutes whose tenacity lied only towards hunting us down. Their bodies themselves didn't differ from ours at all.

That's how it should be.
Then in that case, what is this supposed to be?
If the attack was ineffective, that would be another matter, but after so many of them had fallen, for their flock to continue to go on like that should be heresy to an Angel.

Wrath Skills weren't suited to rapid fire.
The Angels spread out. It was likely a plan for them to not all be taken out at once. That wide formation showed off their clear knowledge of how to deal with Ira Skills, and their narrow area of effect.
And as I thought, those heavenly wings still didn't have me set as their destination.

They didn't fight back, and they didn't use any Skills.

Before my wrath, these Angels' flight… their march was surely backed by some form of strong will. Something that exceeded their innate instinct to oppose Demons.

"Even with me before their eyes… they'll still head for niisama…"

Then there's even less reason to let them through.
I spread that dark heat across my mind again. My instincts and emotions raged up to burn through my entire body.
In proportion to my anger, the incessant violent waves of Mana weighed down on my psych, And I only gathered them at the head of my staff.
Put all my fury into a single attack.

Formation? Plan?

Useless. It's just a pain.
Then I'll just have to burn up everything in the world.
I just have to turn heaven to ash in one strike.

Niisama is the King of Despair, and the most sorrowful Lord on these lands.
With just a few hundred Angels, to stand before dear niisama… it makes me sick.

Foolish Angels. Decay away on these dark lands.
Just like all that have come to oppose niisama before you.

I poured nothing but directionless Mana into the staff, dying it a strong red, and point it at those foolish heathens. The moment I was about to use a Skill, Lize, who was moving right below me, let off a shrill shout.

My subordinate's face seemed to be at its wits end as I looked down upon her.

"Kanon-sama, is this… not the time to use Heard Lauder!?"

"… What?"

Those words released from an unexpected position made me instinctively suppress the powers I was to bring out.
Having become the Great Demon Lord, there were few out there to contest my opinion. For those that hadn't even become Demon Lords yet, I could count them on the fingers of one hand.
Lize's opinion often found itself to be leaning on one side, but her devotion was quite high, even among my direct subordinates.
In this land of warring powers, she was one of the few who had sworn loyalty to me. Her words held some worth in considering.

Perhaps sensing a shift in my will, the flying dragon dropped its speed a little.

"That army is moving at a considerable pace. There's some distance between us, and when they're spread out that vast… to burn all those Angels in the sky… Even for you, Kanon-sama, it is in my humble opinion it would be too great an expenditure of power."

As one governing the same desire, she understood.
The sin of Ira that scaled in proportion to anger was the one boasting the highest offensive potential among the seven attributes, and… the one with the greatest consumption of power.

But I was also well aware.
Regardless of the mere dozens of minutes that have passed since we entered this Dark Prison, the heat that was currently scorching my body, and frothing at my skin was… anger.

Too great a power expenditure?
What of it? Regardless of what I use up, even if I'm to run dry, and be mocked by my subordinate Lords, I haven't fallen low enough for me to hesitate over such a matter.
My desire… the path of my Wrath is something I'll decide for myself.

The clear display of emotions on Lize's face barely changed upon looking at me.
Her complexion was turning a little pale. We've known one another for years, and she should know me well enough, but there was no hesitation in the words she spewed.

"For Heard Lauder, and the Pride he governs, it would be a simple matter for him to overtake them."

If you were to ask whether she was sound, well sure, she was.

But Heard is returning fire with Zebul. He's no leisure to shoot down angels while taking her on.
On top of that, I cannot count on Vanity's forces. Five hundred Demons would just be a nice snack to that Devourer.
That's where Gula's troublesome point came in. To those of them that boasted Sin deep enough to eat up their own race, going at them with numbers was nothing but a waste of resources.

A proposal to maintain the status quo.
I read what Lize had wanted to say.

I looked down upon the impertinent lass I had known from her childhood.
At some point, she had climbed up to General Class, this gifted subordinate of mine.

"So to summarize, it's something like this. You're proposing an exchange."

"Yes, the right man in the right place. That Heard Lauder can keep up with any Angel."

"You do have a point. But there's a single problem in that."

If you're looking at power usage, that plan does have a greater efficiency… if you look at it like that.
But Lize has forgotten a single point.

Her opinion is grounded solely on the assumption that I would be able to destroy Zebul oh so easily.

Her Gula and my Ira have a bad affinity.
Naturally, I don't have any intentions on losing. But fighting her will be a large power expenditure all the same. Perhaps much greater than what would be required to burn up these Angels.

That's just how strong Zebul is.
She's the ultimate predator, and a natural-born warrior.

With her at an affinity disadvantage against Rank One's Heard Lauder, she has the might to persist at almost an equal level, a world apart from any standard Demon out there.

Having eaten on through ancient times beyond memory, her abilities as a Demon, her battle experience, and her ability to devour others were all realized in her extraordinary power.

I mean, the sin she holds dear, the Gluttony to even eat other Demons was… linked to the pure and honest desire to bring malice to others.

I somehow suppress the shout that was about to escape me, and try talking in a soothing voice to persuade her. This girl is smart, and naïve.

"Heard is Leigie's former subordinate. Before him is a stain on Leigie's record. He's sure to shake his head."

"But if you consider efficiency, that's the best option."

Yeah, yeah.
If Heard were to take them on, then Angels of that level would be close to woodchips. He's be able to destroy them all without using much power at all.
But if I take Zebul on, an energy waste is unavoidable.

Even if you call me the Great Demon King, at the end of the day… I'm just a single Demon girl, you know.

I hesitate to let out words.
Even as we speak, the Angels are putting up more and more distance.

But I had to say something. To my cute, cute subordinate.

Perhaps those were the words my father once imparted on me, or perhaps their contents were the same.
Even if their exteriors were to change, at the very least, the sentiment in my heart should be similar.

"Lize, we are by no means… monolithic, you know."

"!? T-that is…"

Let me be honest here.
I am… not able to fully trust the man known as Heard Lauder.
He was Leigie-niisama's right-hand man. But he's also a Demon who once Overruled niisama. I don't know when he'll lash out again.
Leigie-niisama's power is… strong. But at the same time, he isn't suited to battle. His nature was the complete opposite of Heard's. Even that power of ice I caught a glimpse of… there's a possibility it won't work the next time.
And the only one who can suppress that is me. I cannot trust another.

As it is, my power was around a level to compete with his.
If I were to have a loss in strength here, then it's likely I would eventually face defeat to that man.

Rather than Zebul, who eats her kind, or Vanity, who father directly warned me about,

the one I feared the most was niisama's greatest follower, Heard Lauder.
Desire was something that ate up the soul over time. The emotions held by a Demon Lord were in no way something that could be held back by one's rationality.

"So will you laugh upon my foolishness, Lize Bloodcross?"

I've always been a coward.
People say I have intellect unbecoming of the Wrath I govern, but caution is the other face of cowardice.
I can't kill off niisama's right hand man, nor can I let niisama get killed. I can only pray to the Demon World's God, and wait… just as father long before me, I can only pursue a hopeless dream, and learn of an unreachable summit while I protect the seat on the empty throne.

But still, I cannot stand still.
Until some day, I'm swallowed up by the name of Ruin I carry.

Even having received my words, Lize's gaze had yet to change, and she merely looked up at me in silence.

"… Have I become a little too sentimental?"

"… No."

Her look told me that word held no lies or scorn.
Just as I found her long ago, her eyes, her heart, showed no distortion.

Then so be it.

I'll offer up my Ruin to you, niisama.
Angels and Demons, and even God will turn to ash.

That is… the authority of my Wrath.

To hold hatred and resentment for all of creation.

On top of the dragon racing through the sky, I fell to one knee.
The land of the Demon World mainly consisted of spread out deserts of pebbles, and the Dark Prison was no exception.
When I looked down from the sky, I could take in the infinite expanse of land in a single glance.

That land enveloped by darkness that simply seemed to go on, and on. This jet black earth that had never changed from ancient times.
To that ground basked in the Mana of Acedia, I only ever held a single thought.

The distance to the Angels was already beyond my field of vision. But that's no problem. I could get the particulars of their location from my Sone Skill.
At regular intervals, the ground shook to remind me of the clash of Heard and Zebul.
I drove that all out of my mind.

I put power into my staff once more. My fury acted in kind to make the entire body of it emit light like a miniature sun.
The moment I was to let it burst out, Lize's dragon suddenly cut up in front of mine.

"… What is the meaning of this?"

What I was about to reach was far above all the power in her body.
Even if she may be one who bears the same desire, that was hellfire that wouldn't even leave her ashes behind.

"… Hanon-sama, as I thought, I am… opposed to this."

"… What?"

Her downcast face rose a little.
The blazing fire in her eyes blazed with a strong emotion much removed from resentment.

"This is a role you should leave to Heard Lauder."

That idiotically repeated line was just barely able to push down my emotions.
The remnants of my anger drifted out of the staff, and the coat I wore let off a light luminescence.
It's fine. From the Wrath I once held against niisama, something of this level is… something I can bear.

I wanted to tell her to shut up and follow. But Lize's frantic eyes were painful for some reason.

"Truly, that man may betray you one day. I can understand your anxiety. But you should consider the present situation. Out enemy is… the Angels, and Zebul."

Her quivering voice pierced my ears.

My enemy was present in the entire Demon World. While Heard did his share of work, the Demon World wasn't small enough for that to let me gain control of it.
If I were to consider my army as a while, it would be a bad play to exhaust him here.

But once more, it's a matter of future prospects.

Merits and demerits.

If I don't use up Heard's strength here, that man will surely be able to deal with all the opposing Demon Lords. The time to Demon World consolidation will certainly be shortened.

But at the same time, regardless of whether Heard's power is to weaken, or if those Demon Lords out there are to survive… niisama won't notice any of it.

Niisama's Vitality was nothing normal. Even against Demon Lords, that remained unchanged.
Let's say that there were some who could pierce through that. That would only be the few Demon Lords like Heard or Zebul, who specialized themselves on pure offense.

Sharpening power. Killing enemies.
There's no right and wrong. Even if it is just to buy a little bit of time.

I must trim the sprouts of calamity.
That was something that transcended both Merit and Demerit… the initial

prerequisite.
The basic standard I decided on the moment I became Great Demon King.

As long as that's accomplished, then I won't grieve for my power.
I don't… need the world.

"Lize, step aside."

While you're standing there in my way, those Angels are just building up more distance.
My flame of impatience were already escaping my body to raise the surrounding temperature. With their high heat resistance, the dragon's scales let off an offensive smell, as they burnt down. Letting out a low cry, it thrashed out left and right as if to drop me to the ground.

Even if you call it a dragon, in the end, it's just a beast… no, but… Ah, this will work out.

The wind scattered my hair.
By the unrest in the dragon's movements, Lize was far separated from me, and she raised a scream from far below my eyelevel.
I give her a single glance.

You are… a good subordinate.

With the excitation of my Mana, and the manifestation of my spirit, the song of my mind was finally satisfied.
From the depths of hell, where the light of day would never reach, the hardships in the furthest recesses of the earth, carved into my very soul, the song of a Demon Lord.

I naturally began to hum it.
From the vestiges of my widely swung staff, vivid flames continued to pour.

"Dawn Blaze. Oh jet black rain. Let the flames of creation enter my hands…"

I am a coward.
That's why, my enemies, go to hell.
Destruction is my reprieve. So you can just dissapear to the world beyond.

How many years has it been since I chanted the incantation of that Skill on the highest tiers of the Wrath Skill Tree?'

To carry out my Ruin, I activated it.

"Shield Anchor."

I feel the color seep from my world. Demons are being of soul, and their corporeal bodies held little meaning. Their existences were largely centered around their minds.
That was slipping away. A large portion of my thoughts had taken form and expressed itself.

The power collected at the head of the staff shined as a single light, before spreading explosively.

This was the abyss of Ira I had reached.
These flames of creation to rid myself or the rabble resembled the wrath of a form of God, and it was merely beautiful. A power to reset the world to create anew.

The expanding light cloaked the heaven and earth, and cleared away the sky into a crimson aurora.
The growing heat wave condensed to a single storm, and the ground calmed. Taking on the resultant wind, the flying dragon swayed greatly.

It was a wave of light.
Just as niisama once sealed the land in ice, an opposite force to bake everything in the world bathed the land.

No matter how much agility those wings may grant them, in the end, they cannot match up to light.
It was only an instant before the flames coming at them at the speed of light swallowed them up without a single one left remaining. Without the time to raise a scream. Without even the time to form a thought.

My resentment burned the sky.

Be they Saint Lord Class, or Demon Lord Class, before my Ruin, they hold no meaning.
The flames cleared.
The sky was a pure red, and in it, not a single thing remained.
Of Serge who flew ahead, and the angels that followed, there wasn't a single particle of ash.
To niisama's enemy, that disappeared before I had ever even seen her face, I held not a single deeper emotion.

The strong display of power was always accompanied by compensation.
A nihility enveloped my head. The power leaving my body caused me to kneel over the dragon. But I won't unhand my weapon.
Until I drop all my enemies into ruin.

"Hah hah hah…"

I gripped the reigns, and had the dragon descend. The hands of the battle below, which had stopped for a moment at the flames in the sky, restarted themselves once more.
The sound of destruction echoing across the land was on a different scale from before.
I've cut off Heard Lauder's hesitation. If it's now, he should be able to give it his all.

If he's to lose here, then… I'll be the one to kill Zebul. That's all there is to it.

Part 4: …What Luck

"Kanon-sama, are you alright!?"

"Yeah."

When I dismounted my dragon, and landed on the ground, Lize rushed over to me.
I'm a bit unsteady, but there's no problems. It was a slight overuse of my powers, however, that should heal up just fine, given the time. It's not a quantity I'll recover over a night or two, but it's nothing fatal.
I could even wage a war right now.

It seems that when I wasn't watching, my level had unexpectedly risen.

There's barely a hindrance to my body's movement. I used much greater an amount back when I liberated the frozen world.

"It looks like all the Angels have been wiped out."

"Yep, I'll bet."

There wasn't a single thing left in the sky. They've disappeared from my Abyss Zone's perception as well.
Lize's expression indicated that she wanted to say something, but in the end, she remained silent.

Desire means you must have your own way with things. The more you're in control, the easier it is to use power.
And that's exactly why, even if I were to use too much energy and ruin myself, I wouldn't hold the slightest of regrets.

For some reason, I became excessively mindful of the Castle of Shadows.

I let out some rough breaths, and put myself in order. Supported my staff… Weydhe, I began treading across the ground.
I can only hate how narrow the extent of my own Zone is.
My perception couldn't extend all the way to the Castle. From here, I cannot discern how niisama fares.

"Will you offer assistance to Heard?"

"As if I could assist a Pride Demon."

If I did something like that… Heard's power will drop.
That will only result in me making an enemy of him. There's nothing more trifling than earning his hostility with good intentions.
All I can do is the aftercare.

I watched the cloud of dust rising over the horizon… the army racing forth on grounded dragons.

"Lize, tell Vanity's army to abate. The enemy they chase after no longer exists."

"Yes, understood."

Lize receives my will, and urged her own dragon to take to the skies again.

I don't know that man's will, but there's no doubt Vanity's goal lay with those Angels.
To chase those flying bugs by giving chase on the earth was a foolish notion to begin

with.
The running dragons that existed for ground movement could put out speeds equal to flying dragons, and they existed in much greater numbers, so they did make for an exceedingly proficient means of transportation, but they were less than worthy to chase those leaping through the sky.
As long as their power is insufficient to go up against Zebul, those guys will have no part to play here.

Just in case, I closed my eyes, and searched every nook and cranny of my Zone.
As I thought, the only Demon Lords here are Me, Heard, and Zebul; the three of us. There's no question about it.

Vanity… just what the hell is he doing?

I couldn't see him anywhere. And that made me feel somewhat suspicious.
Father's words of warning echoed in my mind, and ate into my heart like a wedge.

"… It reeks. I can't think that Venity would take any meaningless action."

Premonition… no, it wasn't something to the extent of calling it a premonition.
This is… merely unease. I'm just a coward. It's a topic that will draw to an end if I leave it at that.

But at the same time, it's true that it's unnatural, the off feeling that one of my chess pieces had suddenly disappeared.
I forcefully shake off that notion.

"… Well, whatever the case, that's something to think over at a later date."

I pushed down the emotions that were still smoldering in my heart, and looked to the distant battlefield.
Even with my eyes, Heards movements weren't something I could follow.

The distance was around a thousand meters.
With that space between us, I could only see each step of his as instantaneous movement. His speed truly was akin to thunder.
To one constantly clad in a wave of starvation, that would eat into you on mere contact, going at Zebul barehanded was a poor move.
But he didn't even pay any heed to that.

His tactics were simple and clear.

No tricks to play.

Suppression through pure force. That was the very form of his combat. Without any smoke or mirrors, his hands tore the earth, and made mountains disappear.
What's more, from what I can see from afar, even against Zebul, Heard shows not the signs of using a Skill.
He's an idiot.

"Is he preserving his energy? No, it's just his Pride again."

I don't even have any intent to say something about it.

Maybe he's actually stronger without using anything, but… the nature of Superbia's

power was something that could only be understood by Superbia Demons. No matter how much I mulled over it, it would be a waste of my time.

Whatever the case, it's already over…
I'll confirm Zebul's death with mine own eyes, and go home.

In the first place, I have more than enough things I should be doing right now.
I'll have to take another look over the Angels' peculiar movements. I'll have to ascertain the reason they aimed for the Castle of Shadows.
When I think of it like that, perhaps I should have spared an Angel or two.
Well, all of it's already passed. And those guys aren't once I could think of to spit anything out under interrogation or torture.

More importantly, Serge's death will be a huge asset.
The fact that an Angel of that level was able to take down Rank Seven is already a point of concern, but there would be nothing I could do by thinking over that one.

I carefully laid out my worries in my head. My biggest headache has gone away, but that doesn't mean that everything's been resolved.
I'll have to question Vanity as to why he vanished at the critical moment.
Because my greatest goal isn't suppressing heaven, but unifying the Demon World.

But it's fine if I take my mind off that from time to time, right?
I mean, I'm on the road home anyways. How about I stop by the Castle of Shadow for the first time in a while…

"…"

The next moment, when I had just grown a little lax, it occurred.
My zone naturally captured those presences.

It definitely wasn't anything so important.
I didn't hold any fear of my own death, nor did I sense the presence of anything strong.

The only emotions I held were slight hints of resentment and resignation.

Ah, this really is… a pain.

I took my eyes off of Heard and Zebul's battle.
In the direction Lize set off in. I don't have a clear sight of it, but of all things, there's no way that I would mistake those presences.

How many of them are there… they really just keep coming forth like cockroaches.
I can easily destroy them, but there's no helping them ruining my mood.
I unintentionally clicked my tongue.

"Tsk… so they appeared again. Just how many of those guys did they send out, anyways…"

They were certainly the presences of Angels.
As if launched, and propelled, a white light came down vertically from up high. Within it, I saw a swarm of Angels.
The distance wasn't far. It's as if I could take them in my hand.

The number was five. Their power wasn't great. They didn't even reach General Class. It's possible they were even below Knight.
But to be honest, it was really quite depressing.

It would be simple if they came at me of their own accord, but when they thoughtlessly fly about like that, it's truly a pain. No matter how low class they may be, if I let them free, there's no doubt it would become troublesome.

It was annoying, but I reluctantly raised my staff.

If it's only five, then I doubt I even have to deal with it personally. They aren't even that far away, so Vanity's army should be able to handle it one way or another. Lize's more than up to the task.
But without their Lord taking command, it's unknown whether Vanity's Legion would even engage in battle in the first place. There's also the report of an ordinary Angel suddenly climinb up to Lord status.
Then it would be more reliable if I just did it myself.
I need not anything to high class. I select the lowest Skill on my tree, and activated it.

"Angry Arrows."

It's a lower Wrath Skills to shoot out flaming arrows of rage. A trifling one normal non-Lord Demons could use as well.
I made a few dozens. The red lights that came forth in the air around me shot forth.
I'm not sure what those Angels were trying to accomplish, but I shot them all down, and left not a single one behind.

If I just have to target them before they gain any speed, then I barely use up any power. No matter how you look at it, they're mocking me. That was completely pointless.
Unsure of whether more would be coming, I remained poised with my staff, but there was no sign of another wave of Angels. Have I shot them all down with this.

Just what were those last five supposed to be? Was there some meaning to that?
Are Angels merely idiots? Even for that, that was much too foolish.

It only elicited useless questions where I didn't even know if an answer existed. If that was supposed to be psychological warfare, I must admit it was quite effective.
Is it best if I just assume their actions held no meaning?
Still…

"It's a pain…"

The painful thing is how I don't know my enemy's forces.
Should I just retreat already, or is it best if I remained? I want to head for the Castle of Shadows with all due haste, you know… at the very least, I have to see to the end of Zebul's battle.
In the worst case, if it's Angels of that level, I could easily repel them, even from the castle.

While I thought that, there was still no signs of the ground to stop shaking.

"… How long do they plan on going at it…"

While feeling restless at the battle that showed no signs of ending, I looked towards Heard once. The Demon's fight… the contest of desire seriously didn't seem to be ending any time soon.
Heard… he better not be biding his time, having finally found a worthy foe.

Zebul's face was covered with her hunger-turned-dark-aura, so I couldn't' make it out, but I can see Heard's.

I don't have that much spare time, you know…

I took in one deep breath, and glared at the battlefield.

"That's enough! Heard Lauder!! Finish up already!!"

At the very least… use a Skill!

The more time you try to buy… the more my time at the Castle of Shadows decreases!
Of course, I won't voice those concerns.

My scream swept over the expanse of the obstruction-less wasteland.
Heard's movements stopped for a moment. I get the feeling our eyes met briefly.
Without even paying any heed to the Wave of Starvation covering Zebul, the kick he lowered from above came down, and sent her body flying.
Towards me.

It held an energy I couldn't think of coming from an ordinary kick.
While carving a deep fissure along the ground, the Devourer's body flew accompanied by a cloud of dust.
The brushed past me a few meters to my side.
The wind loaded with those black pebbles surged up like a tornado, and spread out in a wide radius.

I instinctively covered my face from the black storm suddenly expanding before my eyes.
I take no damage. That was just that aftermath. I'm not sure about an ordinary Demon, but a Demon Lord wouldn't have gotten any wounds from that.
But it's as iff he were making fun of my lack of preparation.
The wind died down in a moment.

"…"

I silently brushed the hair that came down on my face to one side.
I put my unkempt locks in order with a hand comb, and remembering the scene, my vision was dyed bright red.
I've had it.

"DON'T DRAG ME INTO IIIIIIT!"

From here on, I'm totally going over to niisama's place, okaaaay!?
The anger that should have been used up sprung forth again like a fountain to fill my body.

Calm down. I just have to put it in order again.
I doused my thoughts, and pushed them back deep inside.

The flames of Wrath birthed from my Soul Core flare up as if to cover over my entirety.
It's a sensation I've felt time and again from the moment I was born. A state that Wrath Demons often fell into.

The space around me was baked by my sinful blaze, and let off a blood-red luminescence.

I don't even need to hold the staff.
My raging Ira was merely taking shape.
Black lustered armor. What spread around my body was light and durable, and hot enough to burn through my soul.
I don't have a recollection of having used a Skill.
No, I'll bet I did.

What I had unconsciously put on was a phantasmal armor worn by Demon Lords of Ira.

A manifestation of malice to bring as much destruction to the masses as possible. Its meaning for existence was merely to lead all those that made fun of me to ruin.

I glared at the body that was lying a few meters from me.
A mass of countless poisonous purple tentacles. The liquid dripping from the ends of every one of them, and the ink-black Mana coating her entire figure.
Being dragged along the ground, a number of those tentacles had been destroyed, but she seemed to be healthy enough.

A voice came out. A tired voice.
Her tone was like that of a young boy. But it was a female voice I remembered.

"… Good grief, that Vanity… this is completely different from what he told me, is it not… that's some courage he has for him to be getting in my way."

As if bursting open, the tentacles disappeared.
All those protrusions covering up her form disappeared, and the monster of endless appetite finally showed her form.
It took on the shape of a giel, but I knew she was more than what she seemed.

There's no way she's just any brat. There's no way a brat could stand so calmly before Kanon.
The young girl's lips were formed into a cynical smile.

"What's more, fufufu… for even Kanon-sama to be in attendance. Even with Heard here, I'm already full, and sill, such a splendid menu is set out before me. Have I perhaps been a good girl?"

"Zebul Glaucus…"

And even like that, her expression held no fear, and her gestures, no waver.
Her deep green eyes simply continued to observe me.

J-just whose fault do you think it is… that this pain-in-the-ass situation came to be…

Even when I know I'm wide open, I hold onto my head. I can't help but hold my head. If I don't I feel as if I'll explode.

I let out a rough breath. I'm not fatigued. It's to let out as much of this enormous heat in my body as possible. In order to wash over my waves of emotion as much as I can.
My rationality and emotions were having a bout in my narrow skull.

"Hah hah…"

There's no sign of Zebul raising a hand.
Only the red that painted out my thoughts continued to hone itself.
My instincts for battle started calculating the information around me.
Heard's location. Zebul's. Lize's. Vanity's army's. I understood it all.
Ah, dammit. This world can go to hell.

I prodded my staff into the ground. It let off an explosive sound.
The earth below it melted.
The high temperature earth splashed onto my armor, and let off a peculiarly bad smell.

I raise my face.
All that was left was a single point of resolve.

It's fine. I'll just deal with all of it, and return as quickly as possible.

My trembling lips produced a voice. I'm not thinking of anything. I've no time to think.
That's the declaration I made must have been a cry straight from my soul.

"… I condemn you to ruin."

"… So you've no intention to talk this out…"

I shot down the countless tentacles she sprouted with flames.
Burn through her? Naïve. Ruin isn't anything like that.

"Delete"

"Tsk"

My inexhaustible stream of emotion passed through my staff to birth physical phenomena in the world.
I don't need an aria. Ira is my entirety.

The moment those humble tentacles were to touch my countless lights of Wrath, they disintegrated.
Zebul has a lot of them at her disposal. But I could bring forth just as much fire.

The attacks coming at me from all three hundred and sixty degrees were met by the flames produced by the armor, and erased.
I'm not sure what extent of control she had over them, but at some point, they even started coming out from the ground below me. Even those were easily dealt with by the fire. Those hands of hers are never to touch me.

Having finished burning through all her tentacles, the flames onverged to delete the girl herself.
The swirling wave of fire caused her face to turn a little pale, before she took a large

leap back to avoid it.
Reflexes, and experience. I can't deal with her through ordinary means. Perhaps she even has the experience of devouring a Wrath Lord of my level.
But I know. I knew this would never be so straightforward. Then I'll just destroy that spirit of hers.

Without learning a thing, the tentacles came at me from all directions again, to be erased by the flame.
I saw her form a slight grimace.

"Oh my, could it be that thing runs on auto? How unfair…"

"Die."

Flames spiral up my staff, and emerge as a blast to burn up the air.
My power is grinding away, and all that was shaved off was supplemented by the beating of my soul core.

If you're going to get in my way, then you'll have to pay for that with your body.

"Fufufu, I won't hold up like this… I never thought that I would end up being personally scrapped by Kanon-sama…"

As she said some irritating lines, Zebul directed the palm of her hand downwards.
The number of feelers extending from her decreased. Did she give up on offense? No.

With her right hand at the center, I felt a fearsome amount of power amass. It was of the same nature as what she had been wearing up to now. But it had a greater depth than anything she had displayed.
Even within this armor of Wrath, I could feel chills enough to pour water over me. There was no doubt she was to show her fangs.

What appeared was a blade.
Its height was close to two meters, and its body was colored in a sinister black miasma. An oversized longsword.

It was a form of disruption that came forth from a series of Skills specialized to attack.
The ominous feeling from it made me forget my anger for a moment.

Zebul Glaucus easily brandished the great sword that exceeded her own height, and pointed it at me.

It was as if to make a proclamation of war.

"Have you ever seen this one before? This is… my『Fang of Origin』."

"Like I care."

It's strong. A feeling of death lingers over my trembling soul.
I shuddered at her power, that exceeded my expectation.
Especially that blade… is dangerous. The alarm bells wrung by the experience I had stored up to now were telling me that.
It was of the most feared line of Demon Lord Skills.
To materialize an equipment with one's cravings at the base, a Phantasm Armament

Skill.

It was of the same sort as the『Ruin Robe』I wore, but that blade was clearly on a higher tier.
I can't see myself being able to block it.
It wasn't a problem with the quantity of power amassed, but of its nature.
I'm pretty sure that's a Skill to ignore defense. One blow would be fatal.

In my mind, painted out by anger, only my thoughts turned at a level pace.
I calculated the damage that blade would afford me. If it ate into me, it would most likely be fatal.
And after a few seconds of calculation, I threw the result out the window.

As if I care.
I licked my lips to wet them.

I looked at Zebul Glaucus, and smiled.

"… A guaranteed fatal blow… what luck."

Ah, I'm thankful for having met you here.
I'm thankful I can bring about your end here.

That power… has the worst affinity with niisama. At some point, it would likely bring calamity to him.

As if my fighting spirit acted as oil, my flames blazed higher. In proportion to my feelings, the armor around me scattered sparks to my surroundings.
Zebul made quite an obvious grimace.

"Damn, I would have been happy if you pulled back there… why is it that each and every one of you have to be so quick to fight…"

I don't want to hear that from you!

There's a distance of ten meters between us.
That great sword has an extensive reach, but even so, she'll need a few steps to be able to cut at me.
My Ruin Robe is a Skill that autonomously carries out attack and defense to intercept enemies. There's no set reach to the intercepting flames.

I have the advantage.
Is what I should be thinking. Normally, that is.
But there's no way the blade in her hand is an ordinary sword. She can likely alter its reach at will. Common sense doesn't apply to Phantasm Armaments.
No,, even if she can't change its form, I should expect such a thing. Predicting beforehand, or taking it as it comes will create a large gap in reaction timing.

I concentrate on every step and action of my opponent.
She has no openings. She should have just carried out an intense battle with that Heard Lauder, but let alone fatigue, I couldn't see a single scratch on her.

I tried to fathom the reason for the fighting spirit in her eyes. What was there was the very same as mine… impatience.
She had just used the word 'scrapped'.

As I thought, her goal is… the Castle of Shadows. It's an idiotic tale, but the target of her gaze passed right through me.
Why is she so panicked? Why is she in such a rush?

"Kanon, that over there is my prey."

"Heard Lauder…"

I looked to the other devil who came to my side at some point in time.
Pure black eyes to look down on everything.
Just as with Zebul, there wasn't a wound carved on his body.
Without a single weapon, or the use of a single Skill, yet regardless ot that, I felt an oppressing weight pressed over me.

And whose fault do you think it is that I ended up fighting her!?

Zebul's frown intensified.
But still, there was no sorrow in her expression.
All that shined was her intent to kill. Before me, and the Rank one, her unclouded will was worthy of praise.
But at the moment, that was detestable enough for me to want to slay her.

The devil of hunder directed a dumbfounded look at the two of us.

"… Fufu, now, now, I can't say I approve of bullying the weak, you know? 『Prideful Kaiser』."

"Hm… I'll admit it. Your desire is splendid. You are… my enemy."

Heard raised his power even higher. So the requirements for his pride were met.
Just how high does it go? I can't understand that man.

Compared to that, Zebul seemed much better behaved than what I'd heard of her.

"… I've no business with you guys. Are you sure there's no way you'll let me pass?"

"Hm… a foolish query."

She'll pay the compensation for bringing shame to Leigie.
That's what his earnest eyes were telling me.

Silence.
There was no starting signal.
Perhaps Heard's fighting spirit made her give up on negotiations, as Zebul's Mana swelled.
At the same time, her small stature kicked at the ground with all her might, and she flew forth like a bullet. In a single step, she surpassed the speed of sound. An impact rocked my body.
That blade of dusk that ate up light itself, extended like a snake. Its tip was aimed at me.

Is she looking down on me? Wrong. Even with Zebul's speed, it would be impossible for her to land any normal attacks on Heard.
But…

"That's the same as looking down on me…"

I pushed the staff's body into the floor, and back stepped before jumping into the sky.
The sword's body shaved away at the ground I had been at before. The land broke down without the slightest of sound, and I found certainty that my own hypothesis had been correct.
A dragon composed of fire spiraling around the body of my staff was released towards the ground to confront it.

Hellfire.
The jaw of that dragon made to turn all to ash closed down on Zebul and Heard altogether.
And it was all sucked into that Fang of Origin. Without a clash of power or anything of the sort, a portion of the power I released was simply shaved away. As always, there's no doubt that Gluttony is a step ahead when it comes to eating.
But my fire wasn't just a straight line.

Sensing she couldn't block it with the sword alone, before she was devoured whole, a black wave was released from Zebul's body.they competed for a moment.
After going through the slight bit of resistance, my flames reduced the darkness to cinders.

"Tsk, what a pain!"

Zebul retreated even further.
The flames follow her, but their output decreases the more waves she releases. She was eating them.
She just couldn't take them all in at once. Knowing that was plenty.

Inferring my will, my flying dragon took off, and caught my back in the air.
I directed the staff below. I've no time to play around. I'll just burn it all away from up high.

"Looks like it's unavoidable."

Having easily evaded what was akin to a surprise attack from the stream of fire, Heard appeared behind Zebul.
Hi lowered his locked fists like a hammer.
It wasn't a metaphor, the desert literally split apart. The earth let out a rumble incomparable to all the quakes I had heard before.
Even from the sky, a massive and deep fissure had been carved into the ground.

On the unexpected spectacle, I swallowed my breath.

"That can't be…"

Heard is scary.
The man who could do that barehanded was scary, but more than that…

"Oww… you're way too merciless…"

Even after receiving an attack tat split the ground like that, Zebul's continued existence showed off her extraordinary endurance.
It's not like she didn't take any damage. Her head had caved in, and her blood had

stained the surrounding pebbles a dark red.
But even that… her broken cranium started regenerating as if rewinding a tape.
Regeneration is fine. That's a single skill of Gluttony. They could use the power they had eaten as a means to heal themselves.
But I can't see the reason why she persists on. That one blow would have easily destroyed the cores of even Demon Lords above the average.

Just… what did she eat?

And I realized it. Heard had not been playing around.
Because of her tenacity, he wasn't able to take her out despite his advantage.

Like a tempest, consecutive attacks from all sides made sport of her small frame.
Even when she brought out a sword, she was losing in a pure battle of close quarter combat. The one-hit-kill blade in her hand was completely pointless if it didn't hit.
Each and every one of those blows seemed to be accompanied by a flash of light, and even I couldn't determine how many hits he had put into it.
But it's not like Zebul was just quietly taking them. She received them by converging the tentacles sprouting from her body on single points.
She blocked them. The fact that she could do that meant her endurance wasn't endless.
I won't let the chance Heard created get away.

"I'm not sure where you got your hands on it… but I'll reduce you to ash all the same."

It's useless.
Even if that Vitality is… something you gained upon eating a slice of niisama.
My Ira can even burn away that Lord of Sloth.

I summon countless bullets of fire, and pour them onto the ground like meteors.
Each and every one of them should be lethal. They'll turn all to ash without even leaving a Soul Core behind.
They're not at a speed she couldn't dodge, but their numbers made her extend her tentacles to knock them down.

It's useless.
I already know you can't eat it all at once.

"Gu…"

Zebul raised a scream.
Her burned tentacles already regenerated. But I was sending down my fire at a rate exceeding that.

"Go to hell!"

The feeling of raining these down from the sky was truly the worst. The way she was barely dealing with all of them was all the more irritating.

As I thought, that blade is dangerous. After sucking in fireball after fireball, it shows no hint of breaking or melting.
It's a weapon that causes them to dissipate with a single touch.
There's no doubt it's a physical manifestation of her hunger.

Zebul used that sword, and dodged with as little movement as possible. Heard exceeded her, and got out without even being grazed.

He easily avoided the flames that would have burned through regardless of enemies or allies, and in just a step, he closed in on Zebul.
Only a tremor was left to prove the result.

Heard's eyes pierced through me. He was clearly pissed.
That malice of his would usually make my fighting spirit blaze up in order to try and stop him.
But fine, so be it. What a wonderful day it is.
That I can eliminate my enemies all together.

"… Fine. I knew it would come to this one day. There's no problem if I take care of it here and now."

It's fine as long as niisama isn't to find out. Given the time, even this matter will eventually be forgotten.

The Devouring Lord lying flat on the ground leisurely rose.
Her arms bent in an ominous direction and her crushed skull set off strange cracking sounds, as her small form returned to normal.
What a monster.

As I thought, my power is necessary.
There's no way I can let this monster enter the Castle of Shadows. As long as she lives, niisama's peace will never be attained.

After coming this far, I could understand. Annoyingly enough there was barely any difference in power between us.
With the sins we embraces differing to this degree, the battle wasn't something to be decided by size of power, though.

I summon my flame bullets again.

I can't call a single one my comrade. From up high, I looked down on the two Demon Lords.

Chapter 6: Irritum's Vanagloria

Part 1: Not a God

Keeping rank and file, those white wings lace the sky.
From the earth well up those incarnations of desire, those to become God's enemy.

Heaven was already a crucible of chaos, of mingling light and darkness.

While they had an absolute scarcity in number, and would originally never be able to form a large force, the Demons' Legions already numbered more than a thousand.
They each took up on the backs of giant flying dragons greater in size than my own body, and raced across the skies that they hadn't been permitted to step foot in before. It could even be taken as a forecast of the world's end.
The air that had received God's blessing was violated with miasma, and none of it gave off a sense of reality.

And it wasn't just these skies that the armies were flying about.
Based on the signals from my comrades all over the land, the Demons of the underworld had formed factions to attack all of our Heaven.

Mine numbered five hundred. Even with the army ranked fifth within these holy lands…
Even if our wings granted us the territorial advantage here…

The Demons came in numbers greater than we of Heaven could ever muster.
Demons were wicked souls, dark minds smeared with avarice.
If you think of how human hearts were easier to turn to bad than good, it's likely just a natural matter of life.

That's why I cannot bear it.
Those maggots creating this nauseous stench to waft about this Eden.

Wings are town off. An ominous whirlwind raced by in the gaps of the light.
Yet another of the Demons stationed behind me fell to the earth.

The irregular army numbering close to one thousand, and it boasted an exceptionally high amount of power.
A man with jet-black hair sat atop a silver wyvern.
Racing left and right about the Demon's war, a commander. I could barely capture him in my field of vision, and among these piles of trash, he was the one with the greatest power.

"Hm… so this is all they have. We've not even the need to bring trouble to Leigie-sama's hands."

"…… !?"

From the Angels rushing up to my rear, countless lights were released to brush out the darkness. For us, that were like God's household, it was an act as simple as taking a breath of air.
Judgement lightning to purify those masses of negative energy. Released without a sound, it filled the sky, and swallowed up that irregular army.

… And, That was brushed off with nothing but a fist.

The army trembled. On that absurd pride. In fear. In awe.
It was originally something that never should have come to be. Something that was impossible.
Our mission was to take down evil. To fulfill our raison d'être, we were to cast aside our emotions.
My sworn friend who ranked second in my army opened his eyes wide, and called to me in a grim voice.

"Gloria, that man is…"

I received the name of Glory from my God.
I held up my hand to stop my friend, who seemed like he'd rush to join the battle at any moment.

The enemy army was too numerous. And that extraordinary man…
Having been created by God, we surely boast a greater amount of power than them. If it were to be one on one, there would be no way for us to lose.
If only we were to destroy that thing rushing about and tearing our light to pieces, the rest would only be a matter of time.

I've not the time to be sunken into darkness of this level.
I stake it on my name of Gloria, I cannot let this go on any further. I shall bring Glory to my God's side.

An indescribable shout wracked the heavens.
The enemy army took position. Those Demons that originally should have been rushing at us to their hearts content were astonishingly quiet.
Hiding behind the back of their leader, they were nothing more than a bother. If only they gave us the space, we would be able to decrease their numbers, and shoot all of them down.

But that meant that the army's strength, and command all fell to that single man.
And so there's but one measure to take. It's simple.

I turned my head to my comrade three heads higher than me. To the Angel with radiant eyes, and six heavenly wings on his back.

"My friend… I leave the command to you. I'll take down that one."

"Gloria… but…"

"Speak not. Your commander is… me."

I am God's greatest blade.
No matter how close we may be, I'll have him obey my command.
Even if I'm at a disadvantage, that level of power, and a soul of that extent, a normal Angel's power… would never be able to stand to it.

And in that case, I, the one brought forth by God to protect the throne, governing Glory and Justice Gloria Seidthroan will be his opponent.

… In the place of my petty army being outdone by something like a Demon.

From the blessed ten wings adorning my back, I released my power.

Without waiting for an answer from the man, I dashed forth. There's no obstruction in the skies to these wings. In an instant, I had come before the man's eyes.
The rising sun. A feeling of catharsis close to omnipotence refined my power.

Now receive it if you will.
The virtue I govern… 『Iustitia』's authority.

I need no weapons. I directed the palm of my hand to the pitiful male Demon who didn't even have any wings.
Eternal darkness, and the mud of destruction. You can just fall back to that place.

"『Judgement Rain』"

The spears of lightening handed down to me by God filled the sky.
The man's dark expression was swallowed up whole.

An Iustitia Skill.
Among the numerous authorities granted to Angels, it was the power most specialized in bringing ruin to Demons.

"Ahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

This cathartic feel of turning it all to nill. An endless laughter gushed forth from my heart.
There's no one to swing their fist before the Glory of God.
No matter how strong in power he may be, in the end, he's just a negative soul. A filthy wingless mongrel fated to crawl about the earth.

My entire body was covered in a light even greater than before. That itself was the proof of my growth.
The proof that my justice had been recognized by God.

"Gloria… don't let your guard down."

My friend behind me made an address with a stern face.
He was a heroic man who had fought a long time as the vanguard of God, but he was too much a worrier.

"… That one is… strong."

"Affirmative. Among those maggots, he… was decent at least."

I turn my eyes to my front.
No need to be tense. He's already gone. I'm not negligent. He's already gone.

There's no way for one who'd received God's grace such as myself to face defeat, and absolute victory was in my hands.

I stopped in midair.
I folded my arms, and glared about the area from which the light had cleared away.

My 『Paradise Field』 Skill vividly grasped the presence of the man who was supposed to have been annihilated.

He was a measly man whose power quantity and quality both fell far below mine. Even among those Demons' ranking system, he shouldn't even be classified as a Lord.
Even when compared to the Lords of Demons I had consigned to oblivion before, he should have been undoubtedly weaker.

But he was alive.
It only took an instant for the light to clear. Those standing proud before the swarm of Demons, my family were slightly disturbed.

"So『Judgement Rain』doesn't work. What an irritating man."

Even after taking up God's rain of judgement upfront, his expression shoed no pain, and his body wasn't damaged.
The man frowned a little, and gave a condescending glare. One head higher than my sworn comrade, the glare let out from that high stature was soaked in a temperature of absolute zero, and it wasn't something a Demon of his rank should be sending at someone like me.
That look and bearing was something I had a recollection of. The sin embraced by a number of Demons I had purified.

"So you're a『Superbia』."

I've hunted down more Demons than I can count. I have ample information on them.

An ability to erase another's Skill,『Overrule』.
What impudence for him to act so overbearing before an emissary of God. They were the hardest to forgive of all those trash Demons out there.

Even when his power was only that which would fly away if I blew on it, his body gave out a feeling of pressure far surpassing his Mana.
That pressure was something I had a slight recollection of, so I frowned, and observed.
Its identity came to my mind in an instant.
Ah, that's a form taken on by his willpower.
In the end, those bugs that haven't even been blessed will become a large calamity if we leave them be.

What a sad thing it is, for there to be a Superbia out to Overrule God's Judgement.

The man seemed sophisticated. Yet he was a diminutive existence that needed to borrow the power of the dragons to even set foot in heaven.

"… Hm. This is a pointless conflict, but at the very least, I'll have you become an offering to my lord."

"Ahahahahahahahahahahahaha, you sure know how to make one laugh. No one lend a hand. This man is… my prey."

On my laugh, the enemy army shook.
They trembled with fear. Your fate has run out here, at this very moment.

I've destroyed hundreds, thousands of Demons. I activate a Skill I've used hundreds of times.
The light sharpens, and takes shape at the palm of my hand.

What manifested was a pure-white sword… in order to cut down Demons, 『Sin Breaker』.
I directed it at those unbearable soldiers who seemed to be under the misconception they could attain victory against God.

Speed. Maneuverability. Offensive power. Territorial Advantage.
In these skies, all of them lay with me.

"If you think you can Overrule the Power of God, then…"

All creation came to a stop.
In a split second, I circled around to the man's rear. Not the wyvern, nor the man, nor even any of my men could follow me with their eyes.

Receiving my 『Iustitia』, the sword let off a dull light.
Right, if he can overcome the might of God, then I myself will…

"… In God's place, I'll deliver heavenly retribution unto you."

* * * * *

Oww…
The depths of my head hurt. My dreams of the past were eating into my present reality.
I slowly opened my eyes.
There's no sound. There's barely any light. That thin ink-like darkness was what illuminated the room.
No matter how much time passed, the dark was the only thing I could never get used to.

"Damn 『Kaiser』…"

No matter how much I hate him, it isn't enough. No matter how much will I bring up to kill him, my emotions won't clear up.
What still existed in the depths of my memory was what despised above all else.

Over the space of many years, that name that had receded to a corner of my memory gained color, and floated up like a bubble of soap. The reason was clear.

"Rank One… The Prideful Kaiser, Heard Lauder, is it…"

How useless.
It's true that the wall between general and Lord is a severe one. But staying as a General Class, he was a Demon who had power rivalling the Lords of Heaven.
Now as a Lord, I seriously wonder just how much power he's amassed.
Even if Rank One was an excessive position for him, there's no doubt he's a superior Demon Lord.

I was sure I was already gone and done with that matter from long ago.
So why is it that that the Soul Core in my chest is acting up once more?

There was no one about to listen to the words I threw out.
I raised myself from the large canopied bed.
It was a vast bed, where even my two meter build could lie, but in my current state, it might be a little too wide.

Around the bed stood a number of humanoid forms.
Wordlessly, they merely looked over me with their glass-ball-like eyes. Countless Demons. Men, women, all ages. An infinite variety. Their beat was a little faint, but each and every one of them was a Demon.

I'm not sure where I had gone wrong.
No, I didn't care that something had gone amiss, but I couldn't determine what to do next.

My wings of light that had once shone so bright were now so dark and wet. This fallen one no longer had any allies, and all that was left was this body itself.

"Ku ku ku ku…"

But that's fine. This body is more than enough to serve my purpose.
God and friends, and even followers are… unnecessary.

My body aside, there's but a single thing I need.

I directed the palm of my hand towards one of the Demons standing about like dolls.
Back when I embraced『Iustitia』, this was definitely not a Skill I desired. But as long as I have it…

Even if… it is the means of a Demon.
I spread out the five sets of wings garnishing my back.

No, I didn't really care about the reason.
I'm already a Demon. Then… there should be no hesitation in me to carry out my desire.

Now, Heard Lauder. Is it not the time for us to settle that match we were never able to before?
I'll teach your body the meaning of defeat.

Answering to my will, the eyes of those around produced a dull light.
The countless subordinates surrounding me all bowed at once with mechanical precision.

The darkness coating them was strong enough to override their Sin, and blow away their sense of self. It temporized their souls.
Not of God, but of my power alone…

"Oh wicked ones, perish by my justice."

Outside the seven sins held by Demons.
In the distant past, when I had been brought to the same level as those I derided as maggots, merely using it made me nauseous, The authority of the greatest of fiends.

When I fell to Demonhood without even understanding the reason, it was what I had held from the start.
And I naturally came to understand that authority's name.

Of『Irritum』.

Part 2: The Glory I Once Embraced

Fall.
Or so my instincts whispered to me. To trample over all aspects of creation, and put them beneath me.
The emotions higher than ever I felt when I was a Lord of Angels often heightened themselves, but they would never settle down.
That's exactly why I'm here.

As I sat with my hips to the pitch black throne, a single man knelt before me.
I'm at the summit of Demon Lords.
The Demon of Envy dispatched by Kanon of ruined kneeled as he directed a sharp glare at me.

"Your excellency, what seems to be bothing you?"

"… 'Tis a trifling matter."

My subordinate lined up perfectly in the throne room raised not a sound.

Among them there was only one that I couldn't openly lay hands on. The only one able to speak.
I've heard the man before me who was sent to observe was quite a skilled Demon.
There were five observers sent to me in total. Of them, this man was the one who had the most opportunities of coming into contact with me.

The vice chief of the Great Demon King's personal military body known as the Order of Black. Eins Grayrol.
He had high abilities, even when compared to my subordinates, a General Class Demon.

He meaning behind her sending an『Invidia』to watch me, I could only laugh upon seeing through that little girl's intent.

Great Demon King, Kanon Iralaude.
Even if she had power, she was a Demon who hadn't even lived ten thousand years, and she was severely lacking in experience. There were plenty of ways to do it.
If you want to try to control me, then it isn't numbers you need… send in a Demon Lord Class observer, or we won't be getting anywhere.

In a succinct tone, with considerable hostility packed into his eyes, he directed his gaze at me.
But he didn't pay mind to anything else.
What he once held when he was first dispatched here, that unease he got from my doll-like men had long disappeared from within him.

"Your excellency, there is a single matter I wish to inquire towards…"

"… I'll allow it."

"Yes. Recently, it seems the number of soldiers in your Legion has been decreasing

ever so slightly, but are you aware of this matter?”

A small shadow occasionally flashed through the man’s eyes. That was the light of doubt.
There’s nothing you could call sincerity among Demons.

A foolish question. My army exists for no other purpose than to answer to me.
I’ve already issued orders to those forces stationed all over my lands.

“I’ve dispatched the army.”

“!? … Why? At present, there should not be a hostile force anywhere around your territory.”

Correct. I fear not the power of that Heard Lauder, and anyone else who would set foot on my soil are akin to nothing.
If there was a single possibility for me to fear, it would be that maiden, circling about and crushing Demon Lords.

But that isn’t enough. That isn’t nearly enough.

I know the power of a Valkyrie. Even if she be on the level capable of crushing Lower Level Demon Lords, she won’t be able to touch that Prideful Kaiser.
No, more so, I doubt she’d even be able to stand up to that Iralaude.
Her attributes were too low. Lower Ranks were one thing, but she was nothing but a trifle to us.

Still, in that case this’d never work out.
Rejoice, Valkyrie. I’ll give you some achievements.

“Ku ku ku, Angels…”

On those words, Eins’ features shifted into a questioning expression.
In silence, he blinked a few times. With a voice tinged with caution, he went on.

“An… gels…? I deeply apologize. I don’t really understand what you’re trying to say…”

“I doubt not your ignorance. Now’s not the time.”

Yes, you’ll understand soon enough.
I directed the palm of my hand.
I didn’t even have the need to bind him with my Evil Eyes. Vice chief? Useless. The caution of a Demon of this level can’t even be called as such.

I activated a Skill.
An uplifting feeling no different from the exaltation I felt when using the power of God I embraced raced about my body like lightning.
At the man’s back, a dark fog began to gather.
In a silent stupor, his expression hardened as that darkness gathered before his eyes, and covered the upper half of his face.

The man didn’t raise a scream. His posture didn’t change in the slightest, and only his facial expression twitched mildly in fear.
As if he realized he was forgetting something important.

"… Yes, I beg forgiveness for my rudeness… It was about the Angel attack incident, correct?"

"Correct. You may go report to Kanon Iralaude now."

The Angel Attack.
A flock of Angels had suddenly launched an attack on the town of Grey Rock.
Grey Rock was a town on the border of the Dark and Crimson Prisons.
The Dark Prison. In the past, it was under the control of the Great Demon of Sloth, Leigie Slaughterdolls, and right now, that vast land was placed under Heard Lauder's jurisdiction. With three times the area of the Crimson Prison, it was exceedingly vast, and that was to an extent where even Heard's zone was unable to cover the entire thing.

Eins' eyes distorted.

"… For me to forget such a thing… it appears I'm a little tired… I will report… swiftly…"

"Ku ku, a foolish man."

I lifted my palm again.
It's unnecessary. Your unease, and your questions are unneeded.

Now just forget everything, and give your little report.
I activated up another Skill. Third on Irritum's Skill Tree. One to coat over the truth with fabrication.

"『Outer Rewrite』"

That muddy darkness ate into the man's memory, and covered up his original motive.
Like a wall of paper, the Status Abnormality skill was easily breached.
It was all too simple. While a Demon Lord may be able to put up some resistance to it, a General could only muster a soft push.

Without changing his expression once, he emotionlessly looked thought over what had been overwriten.

I don't know why I gained something like this.
I don't, but if it is to exist, then I'm just going to put it to use.
In order to make those Demons I'm supposed to despise into my tools.

I waited a little for his mind to smooth over, before addressing him.

"It's a simple matter, is it not? Noy go forth, loyal apostle of the Great Demon King."

"Yes, I'll go… and report."

Eins left. I watched him off.
Even while my eyes were following him, my mind was occupied by one thing alone. Of my sworn enemy from the past.

I stood, and looked up at the ceiling.
The emotional voice that gushed up from the depths of my soul were released from my mouth.

“HEARD LAUDEEEEEEERRRRR!!”

In this throne room without another capable of thought, only my wail resounded.

Why, why is it? Why does my sentiment extend to this extent!?
I never felt this for the past few tens of thousands of years, and yet why is it exploding out of my come this far in time?

If I just wanted to destroy him, if I merely regretted having failed to kill him, then all of this would have been easier had I acted before he became a Demon Lord, so why now!?

“Ku ku ku ku ku.”

I naturally poured out a sneer.
In response to that, the systematically lined up thoughtless army raised an ovation.

“Vanity! Vanity! Vanity!”

It didn’t make me happy at all. I’m not sure whether the chills I felt racing around my body were fighting spirit, or fear.
In order to learn that, I’ll have to make him face defeat.
I’ll take down his『Pride』with my deceit.

Five sets of wings sprung from my back.
In the past, they were enveloped by a white phosphorescence, but now black mud molded their shape.

At the same time, the worn out body I had hastily made for the time being crumbled away into mist. It was the shape of a militaristic man I had mockingly devised.
I looked at my palm. It was my original body, half that large man’s size, of back when I was still an Angel.
Not specializing in physical strength, but magic, the body known as the『One who Protects the Throne』was always disguised as Vanity that I was starting to wonder which one of my shapes was the true disguise.

“Now, stand before me, my beloved maggots.”

My subordinates silently assumed their position in the line. To the swarm of Demons who had lost their wills, and had their desires overridden, I directed my palm.

He is strong. I know that.
Even within this Demon World, Heard Lauder’s strength was heresy. Going at him straight on is close to impossible.
His ability allowed him to escape my hand when he had yet to even become a Lord. Now that he’s reached Demon Lord Level, it will be all the more difficult.
And that’s why my authority lives on.

“… I’ll grant the sky to you.”

Irritum is to hide truth, and make it meaningless.

I activate a Skill.
Their cores. Just the cores are enough.
These low ranking Demons are of no use at all. So I’ll be the one to give them power.

Their existence will take to the air for my sake.
Now dance to my tune if you will.

"『Outer Decorate』"

As I invoked the Skill, the Demons' bodies started to bubble.
They were diminutive existences. And to conceal that fact, the wriggling darkness took them in, and it only took a few seconds for them to take shape.
Out of lumps of mud, wings begin to form.
Pure white wings.
The masks that had been covering their eyes also turned white, and expanded to cover their entire faces.

What was standing before me was Angels.

Their power was a fabrication, yet a reality. That ostentation was great enough to fool even the world.

There was no difference from what was dwelling in their bodies to the power of light. Therefore, that power existed for them to bring ruin to Demons.
The power to brush away the darkness had been brought forth from a Demon's ability.
That's why I had no need to argue with the power I had been granted. There's no way the beings born from me could be anything else.

"Justice… is it…"

What resided in their body was the authority of『Iustitia』I once held.
But at this point, that was a word without meaning.

Still, to kill Demons, there was no better suited ability.

Those wings constructed from the blood stained darkness began to shine like light itself.
Strangely enough, the expressions of those inorganic hardened forms of my vanity were barely any different from those subordinates that followed my lead when once I took God's will to heart without question.

Between Angels and Demons, there wasn't a single difference.
From when I was an Angel in service to God, to now with no one to follow, all that I had lacked was an absolute sense of self.

It merely piled up. The glory I once embraced.
It merely piled up. The sins I built up after I fell.

I don't care whether it's a fake or a lie. The truth is meaningless before my objective.

Power requires a compensation. Decorations require a base.
Mana, power, desires, they all drain out whenever I use a Skill. But even that was something I only experienced as joy.
In proportion to that, my troops became more and more beautiful. With that deceptive light forged of darkness.

Creating Angels was the work of God.
Then even if it be transient, for me to be able to do that, there's no doubt I'm closer

to God than ever I was with those white wings on my back.

When I was part of the vanguard of the sky, I had power. Overwhelming power, God's love, justice.
How ironic. Even after falling to Demonhood, that power hasn't fallen in the slightest.

No, more than that…

I licked my lips.

Heavenly troops need a leader. To create a sense of crisis in this land of Demons, a considerable amount of power is necessary.
I selected one from the line, and stacked on even more fabrication.
Before long, an Angel with enough light to call excessive was completed.
I can't have my power use itself up. Even if he may be lower class among Saint Lords, there should be no hindrance to the destruction of Demons.

The soul colored by Irritum.
The glittering light it gave was the color of an Angel's, and I found that terribly irritating.

Without letting out a single voice, the Angel stood there.
A shite mask to cover the face. But under that, no expression existed.

On these lands, a presence of light stands out. With the Abyss Zone Skill, their natures would be sensed from a long ways away. If I stayed by their sides, I could eliminate their presence with Skills, but that will become difficult if we separate.

No, even if that isn't the case… these Angels cannot reside in heaven.

Just as I once did to command my troops, I raised my hand to the sky outside the window.
That sky of chaos stained in a bloody red.

"Conquer."

The line of Angels all flew out at once.
But in my heart, not a single feeling of nostalgia surfaced.

Even when that scene surely resembled when I was still an Angel, the world I saw back then.

Part 3: Each and Every Desire Should Just be Devoured

Both Demons and Angels had instincts.

Demons and Angels were just right souls and wrong souls. Between them, there was an instinct for them to reject the others' existence.
An incomprehensible feeling of impatience that would rock the soul just by having one next to another.

Unable to stand an encounter without trying to kill one another, it could be called a second Desire.

Before my eyes, 『Vanity』 was blown away.
I saw the built up months and years of training behind the speed of that punch.
Even that body I had modified to be able to stand up to a Demon Lord's might , that impregnable fortress of a body was torn apart without being given a chance to react.
Regardless of its truth, not even its soul core remained.

As I thought, the position of Rank One was no decoration.
Dammit, Heard Lauder.

His power was greater than I anticipated. Going at him head on is… nothing more than a stupid move.
I am in no way a warrior. My goal isn't conflict, but victory.
Not the process, but the glory. From the start, that man was a beast. I've no intent to exchange blows with such a brute.

It's precisely because of their Pride, that Pride Demons are full of weaknesses. That guy's weakness was especially clear.
I've already determined my thoughts on the matter.

But before that…

After Heard ran off to chase Zebul, I walked up in front of the clueless girl he left behind.

She was a young lass with golden hair, and an impertinent expression on her face.
Oblivious to the world, unknown to tragedy, and without any foundation she was one that looked down on everything in creation. Her condescending expression made my skin crawl.
While humming a merry tune, she calmly walked through the lines of soldiers, and regardless of the fact that she hadn't done a single thing herself, I didn't feel te slightest hint of indebtedness in her.

I believe Heard called her Hiero. She was cowering behind Heard during the meeting as well.
She was an existence so helplessly weak I couldn't fathom why that man chose to drag her along.

I hate fools and weaklings.
It's always been that way. Both Angels and Demons regardless.
For both those Demons that only pursued their desires, and thought everything could be solved with an exchange of blows, and those mindless dolls that thought all they had to do was listen in to God's orders.
Why is it that I… have to play part to something useless like that?
They're the ones who should be learning their place.

By the time I noticed it, I was staring fixatedly at her form.
Even when her power was one that would go out if I blew on it, her recklessness on staying in this place was the very thing I hated about Demons of Pride.

Then, if it's like that… right.
How about I… give you some wisdom.

"Mm? What is it…?"

I extended the arm of the Demon closest to her.
Having her shoulder grabbed, Hiero turned with a blank expression. Her face indicated she believed there wasn't a single thing to harm her here.
With nothing but pure curiosity, she looked deep into the single Demon's mask.
It was a humanoid Demon with a large build. The upper half of his face was covered up by a grey mask.

That mask wasn't just some accessory.
Covering their faces, their expressions, held meaning.
One's expression was their individuality itself, and by hiding it away, I could bring about changes in their psyche.
It was a means to overwrite their measly spirits with an image of strength.
It was a single ritual.

A way to paint out right and wrong and Angels and Demons with chaos.

"Oh, could it be that you guys can actually move without orders? Kusu kusu kusu… I had thought of you all as nothing but dolls."

Even when grasped by one two heads higher than her, Hiero's expression as she looked up at his face was a bright smile.
His arm let out a dull sound as it broke. But the face of the woman who did such a thing didn't seem to hold the slightest interest in what she had done.

As one who also governed Pride, I had a clear grasp on what power she held.
Unbefitting that soul of hers, a powerful『Overrule』Skill.

Ah, how surprising it is.

Without a fragment of understanding as to just what she was talking to, Hiero widened her smile, and tilted her head.

"And, what is it you need?"

… But how interesting.
A sharpened soul.
The power hidden in it had far surpassed her own self. That『Overrule』, the very definition of pride… just what basis does it act on?
And why is Heard dragging a useless woman like this about?

"Interesting…"

"!?"

The arm was released, and Hiero instinctively retreated a distance.
The pride on her face from before vanished, and a stiff expression looked over me.

"W-who are you!? What's this all of a sudden!?"

The eyes of this girly who hadn't even lived through a tenth of my life inspected my body quite rudely.
While she did seem wary, she didn't even get stanced for battle. I'm not sure whether that was supposed to be her Pride or not.

Or perhaps it was her bearing that didn't even see enemies as enemies that formed the mold for her firm mindset.

I touched the mask covering my own field of vision.
It was a cold sensation in my hand… the gray mask sunk away without a sound.

"… Hah…? What are you supposed to be… are you Vanity-san's… subordinate?"

… Fool.

The ability to even paint over the presence of my own soul, and conceal myself from search Skills was Irritum's greatest advantage. Even a Demon Lord's Abyss Zone was unable to pick me up.

Rather than Superbia, whose output rose the more one showed themselves off, the authority of Irritum was one to hide one's self, yet still decorate it. Truly one suited to resourcefulness.

I ignored the girl's panic, and started observing again.

Right, no matter how I look at her, I can only see a frail Demon.
While she did, more or less, have a strong ability to『Overrule』, that level wasn't at Demon Lord Class, and if I had to say, her only real special point was the very fact Heard was taking her around. Even if I did absolutely nothing, she was an ant-like existence that could easily be crushed by my army.

That confidence against enemies she knew she could beat, and this dismay against the unknown. Her body was unconsciously preparing to take flight… I don't think she's even a warrior, this one.

A demon I'm surprised to find anywhere near Heard's side. Just what part of her tugged at his heartstrings?
I can't even possibly see her as someone that battle enthusiast would fall in love with.

Whatever the case, that's all irrelevant to me.
What's important is… if this girl can work as Heard Lauder's weakness.

I cast aside the thoughts surfacing within me at once.
No, I doubt she'd do any of that. There's no way she would. If he could be destroyed that easily, he'd have been killed off at a time long passed.

My interest is starting to escape me.

While she certainly was an interesting woman, no matter what sort of existence she was, she was irrelevant to Heard Lauder's impending destruction. Seeing the way she stuck by his side and followed, I can't even see her as an assistance, but more than anything, this girl… is too young.
She wasn't even a pebble by the wayside. A single Demon whose life or death wouldn't bring about any influence at all.

I ignored Hiero, as she directed scared eyes without even a hint of fighting spirit, and used a Skill.

A dark grey light covers my entire body.

The authorities of Superbia and Irritum.

My Mana becomes my armor. To pass by all of creation, and bring about a miracle.
With my soul at the base, I create the form of a hero.

I show off. My own power.
I pile it up. Only to some day show it off to the world.

… To look down on the high and distant heavens.

Irritum held a contrary nature to Pride, but at the same time, they both held but a single place to aim for.

… Higher than, greater, than anyone in all the lands.
Surpass God, and look down on him.

I understood. From the time when I was the one protecting his throne.
In truth, I had always understood it. Just why it was I became a Demon.

"Ku ku ku ku."

The reason was that I… subordinates alone, I don't even remember the name of my only sworn friend in the world.
I must have been strong. My desires had exceeded my loyalty to my God. That's all it was.

"Hah ha ha ha ha!!"

As light ran all about my body, a pleasant feeling akin to intoxication went through my mind.
It covers up each and every part of my body. Even if it were to be a body of fiction, it did contain my own soul.
I was already more accustomed to the body I had used for many years than my own real body.
How many years has it been that I even laid my own form bare? It's already beyond my memory. I doubt there are many out there that even remember my original body.

My white skin turns black.
My golden eyes to silver. I lost my argent hair, and gained a height that exceeded even that man.
My breasts that were nothing but a hindrance were covered over with muscle, and the pitch wings on my back were hidden away.
More ominous, more exaggerated, and more strong.

An impulse like an electric current flowed through me.
That which I could never get used to no matter how many times I did it was, to put it simply…

… An almighty sensation.

"Hii…"

Hiero's dumbfounded expression warped along with her increased understanding of the situation.
Her face was one as if she were peering into the cauldrons of hell.

Now, to you who holds not the slightest of roles in this play, let me give you glory.
Glory to stand up against your own lord.

I grabbed the arm of the girl, whose expression was still quite stiff.
Those arms were so slender, it felt that if I gripped them any harder, they would break. I lfted her up into the air.

As if remembering something, fear colored her face, and her limbs flailed about, but that resistance is futile.
None of those punches or kicks can do a single thing to this body. That was the difference in our abilities. My buildup of years made the distance between us something akin to an adult and an infant. I'm not something to break under the Overrule of the like of you.

With her body still in hand, I pushed her against a collapsing wall.
I ignored her hand's attempts to wriggle free, and looked into her blue eyes.
In order to scoop up whatever emotions she held within them.

"Guh… Wh… why are you alive… N-no, that form from before was…"

A gray light circled around my hand.
To pretty up the mud with gold, and repaint her existence.
Her body, her soul, her power, her meaning, her memory… her being.

The mask was to denote a Persona.
A mask of the soul to show off one's personality, it was easily able to cover up whatever mask they wore before.

I won't change her form.
I doubt Heard Lauder's ever going to hold back, but there's the million-to-one chance he might be mildly disturbed.
I may be able to sway his emotions.

I grasped her had with the palm of my hand.

"N-no, unhaaaand me! What? Are you saying I did something to you!?"

Her body kicks around some more to offer some pointless resistance.
And on her futile plight, I was momentarily taken in silence.
Seriously, why was that man keeping this girl at his side? There isn't a hint of pride in her pitiful behavior.
For one who prioritizes hubris over all, she should be the type he hates most.

Perhaps it was my error to sink to silence, as Hiero started letting out words like a turbulent gale.

"I-in the first place, the one who attacked was Heard-san, right!? D-definitely not me. I didn't do nuffin!! P-please forgive me. I didn't even have the time to stop him or anything! H-honest. I really did think about stopping him… r-right. If you try laying hands on me, my master won't keep quiet, you know!?"

Unsightly. It was just so unsightly that I didn't even feel any contempt.
You're seriously trying to threaten me here?
Can your fear fulfill the desire in your heart?

“This is my… Irritum’s… 『Outer Decorate』!!”

“Kuh…”

Hiero opened her eyes wide in fear. Her body was assailed by shivers akin to convulsions.
Matching her emotions of terror, her eyes talked to me.

Fear, reverence, panic, flattery.
Dance on my palms. Become my doll.

The young girl’s slim figure shook. As if to crawl into the depths of her body, a deep gray light encroached her.
No matter how much a hopeless weakling she may be, if I decorate her, she’ll at least be able to buy some time.

I didn’t make a mask for her. That would have stood out too much. Also, if I go as far as to cover up her eyes, then perhaps Heard Lauder won’t even recognize her as Hiero. I don’t change her personality or memory either.

… What I plant in her is loyalty. Absolute devotion to me was appended to her nature.

Around her finger, light gathers in the place of a mask, and a single boorish ring took shape.
It didn’t matter what it was. There’s no doubt that to bring changes to one’s personality, a mask to cover the face held the greatest efficiency, but for a Demon of her level, I don’t even have to use one.
She gave one last large convulsion, before she ceased movement.
Her sloppily lowered arms held no vigor, and on her pale features, her eyes sluggishly closed themselves.

I release my hand. I ignore former-Hiero as she fell onto the ground, and turned to my army.
No will to speak of. Over a perpetual amount of time, the souls whose glory I’ve piled up.

Now, Heard Lauder. You who’ve dragged me down from Heaven.
A few tens of thousands of years passed, let’s have another meet.

A will I never had before offered power to my body.
I surveyed my troops gathered around.

I have no right hand man.
In my army, everyone was everyone, and they were my power in itself.
That means, that all were all, and all were me. An individual, yet Legion.
Sensing my will, the military body lined up next to their mounts.

Regardless of what form they may be in, what was before me was undoubtedly the Legion of a Demon Lord. I nodded.
The masked Demons let out a quiet, wordless battle cry.

The delicate body prostrated on the ground lifted itself.
What was once an existence known as Hiero sent a hollow gaze in my direction.

“The Prideful Kaiser, and the Devourer, I’ll swallow you all in my sin.”

For the Devouring Lord, who once ate up a countless number of my brethren.
Who I let escape, and who became the trigger for my fall, the Lord of Pride.
Those frail Angels who protected the silence while knowing of Demons.
That pitiful Valkyrie who had been attacking this area as of late by chance.

For enemies… they're worthy enough.

I already have the preparations in order.
Now, let me cover all creation in my deception.

Having been effected by unconsciously soaking up my power, the residents of Grey Rock peered at me from the windows with colorless eyes.

Near me, a Demon leading along a conspicuously large Dragon kneeled.

"Vanity-sama, your Dragon has been prepared."

"… Huh?"

Normally, that voice shouldn't have been there.

What was there was the Demon I had just decorated.
I glared.
Her voice as she kneeled didn't hold the slightest hint of indebtedness, and her frame and hair and eyes and voices and powers hadn't changed in the slightest bit from before.

"What are you supposed to be?"

"Pleasure to meet you, Vanity-san. I'm called Hiero."

I wasn't asking for your name.
I'm sure I overwrote part of her personality. I didn't make a mask, so it wasn't perfect, but I did add on to her nature. I never thought that she would be capable of conversation so quickly.
The ring of Irritum I produced was unmistakably intertwined around Hiero's right index finger.

I'm not sure what she was thinking, but the fear on her expression from before had disappeared.
Both her face and posture were the epitome of superficiality. It was much removed from the form I had anticipated. Was her affinity with the Skill exceptionally good?
In the few tens of thousands of years since I began using Irritum, it's a scene I'm witnessing for the first time. Even so, as long as I've forced her loyalty, I can't think she'll go against me.
It was an unexpected reaction. Should I just destroy her now, or leave her be?

There's not even the need to think of it. This turning point is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I can't be paying so much mind to a trifle of this level.

"Is your master not Heard Lauder?"

"No, the one I serve… is surely not Heard Lauder."

I looked down over her as she said that without hesitation.
I didn't feel the cover of falsehood over her words.

Hmm… this is but another bit of entertainment, I guess.

The greater the forces the better. The stronger the structre, the more stable.
I doubt I'll need a shield, but having one should be better than not. Of all else, I already gave her a portion of my power anyways.
No matter how great my power may be, it is my no means unlimited.
Of all else, I already brought forth three Sacred Lords, and a countless number of normal Angels.
I should keep as many forces as possible on hand.

"So be it. Follow if you will."

"… Understood."

My army mounted atop their dragons raised a tremor as they dashed forth.
I already know where they are. Those huge colliding powers were something I could sense, perhaps even if I didn't use my Abyss Zone. It would be harder for me to ignore that those presences stirring up my soul.
The moment I put myself over my own dragon, Hiero called out again.

"… What?"

"… Vanity-sama, for your purposes, I do believe that rather than a beast to race across the earth, a flighted one would be to your benefit. Clashing with that man from the front is a poor choice of move. Even if he be the Prideful Kaiser, he has not the widest variety of strikes to launch across the sky."

"… You're the one that brought this flightless dragon to my side, are you not?"

"No… I mean… I never thought you would be bringing me along, so…"

"…"

I felt my own brows become stiff.

… No seriously, why did that man take her along?
After she disappeared from my field of vision with natural movements as if to run away, Hiero returned with a flying dragon.
It was likely the one she had used to transport herself here. As expected of the possession of Rank One, it had a splendid build.

With movements as if to try raising my affection points towards her, she closed in, and pulled on my arm.
That utter lack of anything resembling Pride made my pity well up before my anger had a chance.
No, perhaps it's something I brought about with the power of my Skills…? If that's the case, then really, I apologize. No, no…

"Now, now, Vanity-san, over here."

"… Yeah, fine."

While feeling somewhat unsatisfied, I put myself over the flying dragon.
Following that, she boarded a smaller… Flying Dragon, likely for her own use.
Oddly enough, it made me associate the scene with the form of Hiero cowering behind Heard.

I should have just killed her without using any power…
This personality of hers…
I started imagining a spectacle of Heard crushing this girl without a moment's hesitation, and my own expression naturally distorted.

* * * * *

The town of Grey Rock was close to the Dark Prison. For ground dragons specialized in land transport, and for flying dragons that rivalled them in speed, we were able to set foot into those lands in little time at all.
From the start, Grey Rock had been a town stationed on a national border, and it was once the front most line of the conflicts between the hostile Demons of both lands. It was also one of the few of such towns that remained after both the Crimson and Dark Prison were taken in under the Great Demon King's army.

Heaven and the Demon world were heads and tails. In contrast to the world up there carefully governed by law and order, this Demon World was rampant with disorder.
On contrast to the scarcity of their activity, the great Demons Heard Lauder, and his former master, Leigie Slaughterdolls of the『Slaughterdolls』were Demons of power much too vast.
While I could tell his strength partly from how that Prideful Kaiser who thought nothing of God served him for such a long time, what clearly demonstrated his strength was the extensity of his Zone, that was able to cover the entirety of the Dark Prison several times larger than my Crimson Prison.

The extent of his『Abyss Zone』was likely the greatest within the King's Army. The current Great Demon King, and even the one before her couldn't extend theirs anywhere near his territory, which was already worthy of being called a single world.
It was much too vast, too powerful. There are even rumors that it had never been broken by a hostile Demon Lord, and many suspected that it wasn't just through pure Mana, but through the as-of-yet unknown nature of Acedia Skills that granted enhancements to it, but the only one to know the truth of the matter is the Lazy King himself.

The Zones were pretty much a Demon Lord's turf.
By touching it, or even getting close, the oppressing feeling that ran through one's entire body was something like a threat brought about by the land's ruler.
And that fact that Leigie's territory had absolutely nothing like that was one of the few pieces of information I held about that Lord of Sloth, as the owner of a neighboring territory.

But I mustn't forget. That doesn't mean he doesn't hold any hostility.
It simply meant… that he had no interest, and that's all it was.

When I entered the Dark Prison, I felt a differing presence cover my body without the slightest resistance.

The proof I had infiltrated a Zone.
The presences of Heard's Pride, and Zebul's Gluttony, and at the base of the two of

them, Leigie's characteristic air of Sloth.
In the extent of this endless desert, I couldn't see the form of any life yet.

"Ku ku ku… we're close."

But I understood.
Even if I closed my eyes, I could tell.
The distance to Zebul. The Distance to Heard.

It was something that my soul, my instincts sought out. What they'd been seeking for many years.

It was… the presence of an enemy.
That urge that didn't able, even for a Fallen Angel, was definitely not something from the instincts of an Angel, but something that existed because I was me.

Zebul's presence was stopped. Regardless of how far she was from the Castle of Shadows.
It looks like she didn't bring along that Greed Demon from before, and there didn't seem to be any lifeforms around them.

She should have just rushed her way through while this land's guardian was away at the meeting, but did she really believe my words? Or could it be that she noticed Heard's presence leve the Dark Prison?
Zebul no longer has an option of escape. She was already within Heard Lauder's range. Once you've stepped into the extent of that man's Zone, you'll never be able to flee from his power.
The distance between them was something that Lord of Pride could span in a number of seconds.

Naturally, the fact she had stopped before that inmistakable presence was likely because she understood that fact as well.
It would by difficult to intercept him on the run. She plans to meet him in the middle.

I remembered Zebul's eyes.

Those eyeballs of hers were soaked in a bottomless hell of desire. That color wasn't something anyone could let out so easily.
If it were to satisfy that longing of hers, then no method in the world would be beyond her.
Ranking wasn't so simply linked to strength. Especially with that beast Zebul… the ultimate predator who would even suck up the world.

And while they're clashing like that, an opening is sure to be created.

Even if they're fakes… Angels painted to life by my Irritum still held the same movement speed as the real thing.
While he's busy dealing with Zebul, my army will break into the Castle of Shadows.

That was the prideful weakness of Heard Lauder. The existence that was once his ruler.
His source. Even with his personality, it wasn't something he would be able to permit.

Riding atop my flying dragon, Hiero, who was riding behind me raised a clouded voice.

"Vanity-san, I think it's best you stopped, you know~?"
But she really is an impudent woman. This attitude after receiving my authority, perhaps this is just her base personality. For me to have overwritten her ego, carving an absolute sense of loyalty in her, and for her to have not changed in the slightest is just plainly amazing.
She's surely a Superbia with a nature close to mine. That character of hers is clearly different from Heard's.

Given the time, perhaps she'll even set foot into Irritum. But honestly, I don't really want to be grouped together with her.

"Vanity-sa~n, if you calm down and think about it… we're screwed, I'm telling you."

"… Screwed, you say?"

"Yes."

I peered behind me. What is this woman saying at this point in time?
In the first place, even if it may be something from a Skill, the way you naturally let yourself follow behind me pretty much means you have no other path in life then to continue on as Heard Lauder's servant.

I let my senses take in the world, as I continued looking to my back.
My physical condition is great, and my soul perfect. I've been saving up Mana for a long while. If I wanted to, I could even create a few Saint Lords at this moment.
I should even be able to destroy the Great Demon King right now.
And you say I'm screwed!?

"I mean, Vanity-san, you plan on fighting Heard-san, right?"

"…"

"And~ that~ means~…"

Because of the flap of the Dragon's wings, it was quite difficult to pick up sound.
But within that, without working herself up at all, she let out her words as if she were just voicing a natural fact of life.

"Vanity-san, you plan on making an enemy of Leigie-sama?"

What escaped her mouth was the name of a completely irrelevant Demon.
Sama.
Leigie-sama, is it?

"… Ku ku."

I understood.
This woman wasn't of Heard Lauder, but of Leigie Slaughterdolls… his vassal, perhaps.
No wonder she didn't act very subordinate-like to Heard.

She likely wasn't expecting an answer, as her mutterings seemed to fade to dusk

somewhere along the line.
They were whispers too light to even be erased by the strong sound of the wind.

"I'm fine with going against whatever it is you want, but Leigie-sama alone is someone I'd rather not oppose."

Her tone, her emotions differed from the frivolous atmosphere she had created up to now, so I found myself asking.

"… Why?"

I'm not sure if she heard me or not, but no matter how long I waited, no response came to me.
But so be it.
From the start, I didn't plan on opposing that man, and more importantly, there was no point.
If he stood in my way, then I'd have no mercy, but for that Lord who'd tempered his Sloth to the extreme to impede me, was in itself an impossible story.

… Right, unless some miracle were to happen.

We preserved the silence as we continued to fly on. Before long, we closed in on the battlefield.
We should have still been a few kilometers away, but the air experienced a clear change. The smell of a battle, that couldn't just be explained away with us having entered a Zone.
The finest pray I hadn't chanced upong in thousands of years. My fighting spirit towards my enemy danced.

The sky, the earth was crying.
Each and every blow was fatal. Fists that sent my eyes into distress shaved awy at the land, and split the empty air.
The thunderous roars that echoed through the high heavens, and Mana that far transcended that of a normal Demon Lord rose up along with it. It was likely something anyone could have noticed, even if they didn't possess the perceptional power of a Demon Lord.
In truth, even without putting my eyes on it, I could clearly tell this was a battlefield.

It seems Zebul was doing an ample job of stalling him.
My army was also fulfilling their role sufficiently.

Demon Lord Class Demons were a form of calamity.
Their rage was to destroy the world, and kill God. The power of soul released by the two beasts was stronger than any Demon Lord I had ever fought before.

Something that in the old world of humans would have been hailed as a legend, and even in the present state where none dared to intrude on the surface world anymore, it would surely be passed down.
That level of finality existed in this space.
Humans, no, even Demons would throw down their desires the moment their eyes were to capture this battle of legend.

Kill. Slaughter one another. My greatest foes.
Besides my own, each and every desire should just be devoured.

A clash of high level Demon Lords.
What had yet to even enter my eyes as of yet was, by no doubt, quite repulsing.

But the moment before I could clearly capture the scene, the dragon followed my will, and suddenly, its upper half jerked.
It used its long tail to regain balance, and began ascending into the air at a fearsome pace.
Within the thunderous wail of the wind, we were colored with the blood red moon of the high sun. It was surely a sight one could never see in the heavens basked in light.

If we were to go any closer they would notice. That I understood.
By power is working. My Skills are completely erasing my presence.
But even if Irritum were to hide one's presences, it couldn't fool one's intuition.
And those two Demon Lords over there could likely easily sense a presence-less existence or two.

Those Lords of Demons were beings that reached close to the Lords of the heavens without even having received the blessing of their God.

Even if I can grant my men with power equal to Angel Lords, before Heard Lauder's power, they would be obliterated in an instant.
But still, there's no way that wingless man would be able to capture a countless number of Angels fluttering around the sky. Even if he can move with the world appearing stagnant to him, his body was one that could only covet the ground.

I feel them over yonder, my subordinates… let me grant even greater glory to that Angel flock.

I'll give them a portion of my power, and add more fuel to the blaze of their souls. The flocks speed rose even higher.

"Oh filthy souls. At the very least, burn yourselves out radiantly in the name of my Vanity!"

Now, give chase if you will. To those invading the lands of your lord.
Show me the depths of your desire, Superbia!

Those ancient battles of heaven flashed through my head again.
Without a single smile on their faces, to accomplish their justice, those vast legions of white, and those that were under the control of absolute power to pursue their desires, the black legions.
But I noticed one point that differed from the truth of my memory.

I freely manipulated the flying dragon around that biting mass of fighting spirit.

Yes, it truly was but a trifling difference…
That I myself was no longer a part of either of those Legions.

Part 4: This is why Demons are…

Demons and Angels were contrary entities. But it's not like their existences were counterbalanced by one another.
Against the light released by Angels, the darkness a Demon could amass was easily cleared away.

No matter how powerful a Demon's Skills may be, the disadvantages they were born with weren't something so easily overturned.

My memory let oud a grating sound, and ached.
Even if I was up against a Demon of Pride powerful enough to repel my『Judgement Rain』, in the end, there shouldn't be any reason why I lost to one who hadn't even reached Lord Leve.

… But, for some reason, the conclusion of our bout had been cleanly wiped from my recollection.

"Vanity-san? Are you finally losing your nerve at this point in time?"

"… How foolish."

Faithfully following close to my rear, Hiero breathed out a whispering voice.
I accepted those words with a smile, and cast them away.

Losing my nerve?
I, the one who was once the closest in the heavens to God, am losing my nerve to nothing but a single Demon Lord, you say?

Useless provocations.

Anyone who embraces such an emotion has not the qualifications to become a Lord.

But at the same time, I was vigilant. I have no reason why I faced defeat the last time.
I'm sure Judgement Rain was blocked. Repelled, dissipated.
But still, I really can't thing that something of that extent could triumph over the abilities I had at the time. Much less for one who wasn't a Lord.

… And in actuality, I'm still right here without having lost any power.

Using the eyes of my subordinates, I observed the scene below. Their eyes had already reached the battlefield. Without wasting time, they raced straight through it.

Heard Lauder and Zebul Glaucus were approximately equal.
Heard with his godspeed mobility, and Zebul with her abnormal regeneration, and high offensive power. It looks like the Devourer's more competent than I gave her credit for. Between them, there wasn't as much difference as indicated by their Rank.

Right now, Hears Lauder is likely regretting his decision of trying to take care of Zebul before moving on to other matters. Even if he could only take them on one at a time, he should have chosen to deal with my Angels in the sky.
The current difference in ability. Heard had the advantage, but if he showed the smallest of openings, then the Devourer, with her Gula's large area of effect would immediately send high level Skills at him. If he took a single one of those attacks, then the damage he'd suffer would be severe.

"So I'll have to make a move… no."

As long as I've yet to determine what sorts of trumpcards he has, negligence is forbidden.
And anyways, I have no reason to assist Zebul. Having them take each other out is the outcome most convenient to me, but I don't think that's possible… still, if they're going at it this hard, then even the winner should have a considerable deficiency in power. I just have to wait patiently.

"… A~hn, I can't see what's going on at all~…! Vanity-san, Vanity-san, let's ambush them…! It's alright, while he's fighting with Zebul, if you secretly send an attack from behind, then even that Heard-san will…"

"…"

Just what is this one saying?
I've decided to ignore this girl completely.
Of all things, Hiero seems to be trying to tease me. Just what was Leigie thinking when he took her on as his subordinate… no, perhaps she arbitrarily became one…

If he could be done in by a surprise attack, he'd be long dead by now!

In the first place, there's no guarantee that Zebul's my ally.
If I show the slightest negligence, then I don't think that woman would have any qualms with swallowing me up from behind.

I give my subordinates some more power. I raise the flight speed some more.
I know. Among Superbia Skills, a long range attack… does not exist.

Heard Lauder has no means to stop a flock of Angels, and if he lets them by once, the until they reach the Castle of Shadows… until they reach his former master's stronghold, there's nothing to stop them.
Can your Pride permit such a thing? No, it can't. That's the sort of Demon he is.

"… In the end, that's all there is to the man…"

"Vanity-san, just one hit! How about you just put in one nice hard blow! Just a single clean shot as you pass by!"

"… Do you happen to have some grudge against the man or something?"

"… No, not particularly. See, I'm your loyal, loyal subordinate, so I thought…"

Her nonchalant tone and figure as she averted her eyes was, no matter how you look at it, completely lacking in something called sincerity.
Heard… looks like you've had your share of troubles too.

I gave an order to the selfish Demon blessed with a twisted form of will-power. I just kinda want to get rid of her already.

"If you're going to say that much, then why don't you go forth, Hiero."

"… Fweh!? Eeeeeh, no no no, look, I… don't have any power, and…. I-i-i-it's impossible. Heard-san is Rank one, you know? Demon Lord Rank One. I'll be killed in a single breath. That person doesn't know the meaning of holding back!"

"… Ku… ku ku… Power… power, is it? You say you don't have power. Then very well… I'll grant it to you!! With this power in hand, strike down Heard Lauder!! 『Outer Decorate』!"

If you want it, then take it! Now go, go, go already!
I put in much more power than when I first used on her. I still had a little left over. I'll give her so much that she won't be able to offer a single excuse anymore. I'll stuff you so full, it would be a waste for such a small fry like you!
I'll give you power to your hearts content. I'll bet General Class is insufficient. I'll keep pouring it in until you're a splendid Demon Lord!
In the end, I had powered her to at least the level of a Lower Ranking Demon Lord. Among those in service to that Kanon Iralaude, she'd likely get within the top ten if ranked.
Perhaps she's around the same level as those that are getting killed off by that Valkyrie, but there's no doubt she's a Demon Lord. If you were to compare it with her previous level, it's likely over a hundred fold.

Noticing the power that had piled up in her own body, Hiero shuddered.

"Now, I gave it to you, Hiero. With this, there shouldn't be a problem. Now go!"

"Ah… eh… for real… Wait… n-no, please wait a minute!! T-the truth is, I'm not actually a soldier!"

"Dammit… even after all that, you still plan on giving excuses!?"

"I-I mean, I don't know how… to use my Skills at all, and… Ah, V-Vanity-san! Look, this presence is…!"

Honestly, I was quite irritated. For someone to piss me off more tha Heard, I don't have any recollection of anything like that for the past few millennia.
If it's like this, then even if she doesn't put Heard off his guard, then taking away her personality, and giving her a new Persona may be my best bet.

However, it looks like I'm not going to have the time to do that.

"… What is the meaning of this? Why is she at a place like this…"

One of my subordinate Angels in my range of perception vanished.
Absolute flames. By that fire heralded as the strongest force in the Demon World, a number of those Angels' bodies disappeared in an instant.
Flames of destruction. To reset everything, the flames of Ira.

The fact that she hadn't entered my Zone was linked to why my recognition of her came late.
No, it's because I never believed she'd be at a place like this. I mean, that one's…

"Why is the Great Demon King on these lands!?"

"I-I don't know, sir. Maybe she's out on a walk?"

Oh, but of course!!

This is completely unexpected.
But having come this close, I felt it. Without a chance of misreading, this is the Great

Demon King's Mana.

The current generation's Great Demon King… despite the Wrath that little girl Kanon governed, she had quite the calm, intellectual composure going on.
She didn't do anything too illogical, and these days, she rarely ever goes out like Heard to solve the problems extending beyond her territory. Therefore, she's easy to read. She's certainly powerful, but that mind not to openly wander into danger was one I was sure wouldn't get in my way.

And in that previous meeting, she didn't even show any intent to go to the front lines.

The angels I created go down one after the other. Kanon was launching attacks on them.
Personally… she personally came to these lands just to wipe out an Angel Army of this level!?
No, even if that's the case… I can't let my concealment of Irritum break.

My plans are falling apart. It's impossible. Against one possessing top class destructive power like her, this army of Angels is close to nothing.
I disperse my forces. In order to reduce the chances of being shot down as low as possible. But one by one, she began deleting those divided Angels moving at a considerable speed.

"This can't be… this is bad…"

"For so many high ranking Demon Lords to gather in one place, how rare…"

Rare? It's completely unheard of.
Perhaps regaining their momentum because of Kanon's arrival, or because they lost the need to pay mind to the Angels above, the magnitude of the tremors below increased in scale.

And in the next instant, Kanon's Mana swelled up.

It was a flash.
A wave of fire instantly spread over the sky, and died it a crimson that foretold the end of the world.
The heat wave swept over to burn up all creation. Its force worthy the name of Ruin.

That little girl… she used a high ranking Skill against opponents of far lower class…
There should be a limit to overkill.

The reactions I felt from the Angels went out all at once.
Against the fire coming at me from top to bottom, left to right, I used my own『Overrule』.

It was an enormous amount of pure energy, fitting for her title.
She must be storing up quite a bit of rage over her everyday life.

"Ugwooooooooooooooooooooooooh!!!!!"

At most, it's been ten thousand years and a little since her birth. Kanon's accumulated years didn't even match up to a tenth of mine.
My Overrule, the superiority I felt as a leader, the sentiment of supremacy I once felt as a Lord of Angels blocked the unavoidable flames, and began to extinguish them.

My power, my Mana is leaving me. The power I had stored up for so long, the power I've amassed, in order to avoid my absolute destruction, I have to unleash it.

I know not whether the flames had continued on for a few minutes, or perhaps only a number of seconds.

And in the end, I came out on top.
The sky cleared. Nothing remained within it.
Not even a trace of that heat was left behind. It was as if that phenomenon that had enveloped me had been part of a dream. But my expended Mana, and the continued nonexistence of my Angels indicated the reality of the matter.

Dammit.
With this, Heard has lost his reason for lament. With two High Level Demon Lords here, Zebul's defeat is inevitable.

"Ku… 『Outer Decorate』!"

Of my army racing across the land… of my stock, I convert three of them into Angels.
Along with a pure white light, the rising false Angels were shot down with arrows of fire from the side, before leaving behind not even an ash as they burned away.
It ain't gonna cut it, I see.

Our affinity is too bad. If it was Heard alone, that would be one thing, but even without wings, Kanon possessed the capability to destroy whatever troops I deployed to the sky.
I have five hundred units left in stock. But I can't just convert all of them to Angels. It would look much too unnatural.

"Tsk… damn that little girl. She came to stand in my path at the worst possible time… my power… my power is insufficient."

"Vanity-san… you know, you could have just dodged…"

Having calculatedly jumped off of her flying dragon to evade the fire in the sky, Hiero shouted to me from the ground. Her own mount had burned to death.

"SHUT THE HELL UUUUUUPPPP!!! DAMMIT, DAMMNN IT AAAAAAAAALLLLL!"

I'm not enough. I cannot reach.
Three of them. Three Demon Lords of the highest class. No, even if it were just Heard and that little Kanon girl, I can't think I'd be able to destroy them.
I looked down on Hiero. That one's no good. That over there is trash. In the first place, a low rank Demon Lord won't even buy time from those two.

My luck was in that I'd still managed to uphold my disguise. Neither my true face nor stature had been revealed. No, I can change both of them at will with my power.
Then should I run? I of all people would choose retreat? Can I permit such a thing?

No, no, no! You're saying I, I'm going to flee before Kanon and Heard Lauder?

Permit… there's no way I could do that.

"Vanity-san, calm… calm down! Please calm down, and give me some more power!"

"… What?"

Of all things, that trash was saying some incomprehensible things with an earnest expression.

"What are you trying to say?"

"Please listen carefully, Vanity-san!"

Her blue eyes were sparkling.
Her arms were forcedly folded, and while she stared at me, I couldn't feel any sincerety from her. Just what is loyalty supposed to be to that girl?

"The enemies number two, what's more, against Kanon-san and Heard-san, even you would be in nothing but a tight spot, Vanity-san. Because it would be two on one."

"As stands to reason. Now try going on."

"And so, it's time for your loyal, loyal subordinate Hiero to shine! If I'm by your side, that makes it two versus two, and at the very least, we'll have a tie in numbers. But with my current powers, be it against Kanon-san or against Heard-san, I won't last for anything more than an instant."

"I see… meaning what you're saying is that if I pack some more power into you, you'll take on one of the two. That's what you want to say, correct?"

This bitch, as if someone of your level could take on either of them.
Even if you had an overwhelming difference in power, you'd lose out in battle experience. In the first place, you said it yourself, did you not? That you weren't even a soldier.
There's nothing left to hear from you.

Hearing my words, Hiero seemed to have some difficulty speaking on.

"No… I likely won't be able to stand up to either… but I will cheer you on, I assure you. Aha."

"THEN YOU DON'T NEED ANY POOWEEER, RIGHT!!!? DAMMMNNN TRAAAAASASSSSHHHH!! Are you perhaps trying to make a fool of me!! What about it?"

Damn. This one just keeps on saying things to egg on my animosity!
I don't care anymore. I've wasted my time. Let's just… confiscate my power back from her already.
If I get back whatever I granted to her, it won't amount to anything great. But it's infinitely better than leaving it to her.

I dismounted the dragon. Whatever the case, since I've become unable to use my Angels, my options have been divided into retreat, or attack.
I glared at Hiero, who was standing upright on the ground. Come to think of it, I get the feeling that fate abandoned me the moment I took you in as a subordinate.

So be it. As the greatest sympathy I can offer, I'll give you a painless death.
The moment I extended my arm to try to take back my power, Hiero frowned.

"Ah, but… it's that… they seem to be fighting one another now."

"… What?"

The Manas of Pride and Gluttony and Wrath mingled to raise a powerful whirlwind.
From the eyes of my army halted a distance away, Hiero was, sure enough, telling the truth.
Heard's fist was directed at the flames surrounding Kanon, and Zebul's Wave of Starvation expanded explosively to swallow all of them altogether. This malice, this spirit, this scenery, they truly were going at each other's throats.

By what logic do the Demon Lords under the same banner start fighting one another? What's more, one of the three is the Great Demon King, you know.
This dreadful lack of cooperation. In the tens of thousands of years since I fell to Demonhood, I think I've come to understand it, but… damn, this is why I hate Demons!

"This is starting to feel stupid, so I'm going home, okay… How about you return as well, Vanity-san? No, it's not like I'll stop you if you want to participate in that battle front…"

Hiero arbitrarily mounted herself on the dragon I had gotten off of.

Yes, this truly is starting to feel stupid. It's stupid, and I can't understand the reason either, but this woman sure does say some unbelievable things.
Still, that three-way-struggle… no, participating in that battle royal truly will be a pointless waste of power.

There was a clear tendency when there were two of them fighting, but now, it's just beginning to become complicated. Originally, those of the same camp should have been cooperating, but it does look like Kanon is aiming at Heard of her own volition.
On the other hand, Heard is putting up an equal fight, and I'm not sure where that confidence of his comes from, but it seems his present level os power is still rising. All three of them held the sins with the highest offensive capabilities, and it wouldn't be strange for one of them to come out on top over a single incident.

While I was stuck hesitating, the flying dragon had taken to the skies, and left. I failed to take back my power.
… But, right. That girl was surely quite clever. For her to be capable of that in this situation… it all just goes to show that I've much learn…

I sighed. Seriously, why is Kanon here… on top of that, this fight seems endless.

The minimum goal of me sending Angels out has been accomplished, but it looks like I'll have to go work over my plan again.
Of all else, I should start searching into Kanon's intentions, and her personality… My number of troops has also declined considerably. I'll have to supplement those as well.

Perfectly at that moment, at the very end of the end, I heard Hiero's voice from up high.

"Ah, Vanity-san. One more thing I might add… You've cut off your 『Abyss Zone』 for now, so perhaps you haven't noticed it, but… it seems like a white presence is headed

in our direction, so if you don't want to take it on, I highly recommend you change your location. Because based on where you're standing, you'll be the first one in its path. Kusu kusu kusu, today sure was lively."

She said whatever she wanted, before the shadow of the flying dragon disappeared into the distant sky. I'm not sure where to, but surely so as not to get herself involved. In the opposite direction from the Castle of Shadows.

Was that report she gave at the end her form of loyalty? … Well, I guess it's something better than zero.

A white presence… white, is it? All of the Angels I created have been expended. And that means that what's left is either another one that wandered down from Heaven, or perhaps the true Valkyrie.

Whatever the case, she's not my enemy, but… if I'm found, it really will be a pain.

Even if I can hide my own presence, I can do nothing to the white one coming closer.

But I'm doubtful as to whether those three will notice while they're so focused on one another…

Now then, what should I do?

As I tilted my head to think, I did indeed pick up that entity in my perception. It was surprisingly close.

Regardless of the fact I had concealed my presence, that entity was coming straight in my direction like an arrow. The distance was something around one kilometer. A considerable speed, and even if I retreated, it's likely it would catch up to me.

I activated a Skill of Pride. It was a Skill to leave behind the flow of time. It's been quite a long time since I last used it. My cognizance sharpened, and time around me slowed by several levels.

And I used the smallest possible movements to dodge the woman clad in light coming down at me from up high, smashed her sword of light, and implanted my fist into her head.

Chapter 7: Fortis' Courage

Part 1: I've not a Fragment of Courage

This is, perhaps, the oldest memory I possess.

"Congratulations, you have been chosen as a Hero."

"…? W-what… is this, who are…"

That black robe that draped over her head, and covered even up to her eyes was the vestment of a magician. A robe you would occasionally see along the main street.
Those that covered their eyes would develop the ability to see 'something' unknown to an ordinary man. But it was a long time later that I came to know that fact.

Without a single harbinger, the magician that had appeared all too suddenly said that to me, who, sword alone, had never even held up a kitchen knife.
I'm not sure what she was seeing with her eyes, or what she had discovered with me, but in the end I never had the chance to find that out. If I were to refer to that encounter in a clichéd fashion, I'll bet it was fate.

"… So… what is… a Hero?"

For the dubious mage that suddenly appeared, and the shady-as-hell voice she threw out, the reason I decided to take her seriously… no, the reason I even confronted her was just a coincidence… or maybe something else.
I'm sure that I just didn't have the will to ignore one who had come to inform me of something of her own accord. If perhaps I had such a will at that time… I should have been able to settle it then and there. But in the end, as if thrown about by the tide, I ended up hearing her speech just like that.

The shady, suspicious magician spoke.

"A hero is one who lights up the darkness with their valor. Who crushes the strong, and saves the weak, the sword of hope to save the human race from the invaders of darkness. And you have the makings of one. I can… see it."

Honestly, I was troubled.
By the magician who claimed to see something I couldn't. No, of the magician who spoke as if she were looking at it the entire time.

For one without a single friend, with my only form of conversation being when I occasionally went out shopping, I had absolutely no idea how to deal with her, and I could only give a vague reply when it came down to it. I couldn't help it.

Without even asking what quality she was seeing. Just thrown around by the waves.

"Um… becoming a Hero is… um…"

I don't have a reason. I don't have any reason to become one. I doubt I'll be able become one, and up to that point, I never even imagined for that option to appear before me. I never thought I'd ever want to become one.
I was… what you find in any city out there, the lowest rank of the city's middle class. Nothing more than a single child.

The magician smiled at my bewilderment.

"You will become a hero, Serge. If you do, then someday when the time comes that those dear to you, your parents, lover, friends' lives are put at risk by the forces of evil, your power will surely come through to put a stop to it. In order not to come to regret it someday, your power is to become… the『Sword』of humanity."

Those dear to me? Parents? Lover? Friends?
Huh? Um… I don't really… have anyone like that.

My parents weren't there from the time I gained awareness of my surroundings. I don't know whether they're dead or alive.
Even I had always hated my own hair and eyes, the dirty color of gray sewer rats. With my lack of sociability, there's no way I would make any friends.

All that I have… are some whose faces I know of, and complete strangers.

I repeated the magician's words to myself, and thought.
Surely, this magician had only ever seen heroes like that. Those with dear ones, parents, lovers, friends. Heroes with the courage and ability to fight the dark forces, or whatever, for their sake.

But I was always alone. Even when no tragedy out of a fairytale had befallen me, I was just alone.
None too smart, and quite weak physically. On my feet, I lost to children three years my junior, and I couldn't even read or write decently. I never felt a sense of crisis from such a thing. There were more than enough of such people around me.

I could only look upon her with cold eyes.
For what purpose did this magician come before my eyes? Just what sort of talent does she see? Did something like that really exist? All these sorts of questions… I could care less about.
The mysterious atmosphere, and her hood that seemed to fit it. I didn't even care whether she was a fake or the real deal.

Of the magician's expression, all her robe allowed me to see was her mouth curved into a smile.

"Please think over it a night. Serge, you have the right to choose. To live as a hero to light up the dark, or… to waste your entire life as a normal civilian…"

"I'll do it."

I replied immediately.

"… And please decide it by your own will. Your fate is… huh… eh?"

"I will… become one."

At that moment, I definitely sensed that her concealed eyes had opened wide.
Surprise. That was the first emotion I managed to give to the magician. It was somewhat enjoyable.

"… Are you sure you don't have to think about it? If you do end up becoming a hero, you can never return to an ordinary life. Perhaps whatever happiness awaiting you in

the future would disappear. Your dear ones, lover, parents, friends, you may be forced to part with them for eternity."

"…"

And I'm telling you I don't have anyone like that. Even whatever sort of worth was there having those four in my life was unknown… to me.
Seriously, what's with this woman, and her obsession with dear ones, lovers, parents, and friends?
The magician's mouth warped slightly. She let out a long sigh.

"Even if your resolve is of that level, I must call your choice to hero-hood to be premature. While I do commend that resolve of yours…"

"I'll do it, dammit."

"…"

The resolve to lose what didn't exist?
Perhaps if I had but a single one close to me, than as weak as I was, I never would have been able to take that option.
But in all truth, I had no one. I had nothing I could call a dear one. With no one I needed to protect, I had no reason to hesitate. My present state was the worst, and as long as I can't think of a life lower than that, then I might as well just press forward whenever the opportunity comes to me.

My ignorance was named as recklessness, and at that moment, it was misunderstood as courage.

"… Why? Why is it that you can be so strong? Even if I call you a hero, you're still human. If you face defeat at the forces of darkness, and face a tragic demise… no, the probability of you facing a fate worse than death is nothing low."

Why am I strong?
I'm not strong at all.

I've not a fragment of courage. I'm just… alone.
If you're going to call me strong, me, with no knowledge or power to boast of… if that were to be reflected on this magician's eyes as strength, then I'm sure…
If the strength of the heroes of the past lay in that they had people to protect, then I'm sure…

My strength is that… I don't have a single thing to protect, and not even the need to defend my own life. I can permit any sort of sacrifice, and that's all it was.

But the magician couldn't understand that.

The reason I would become a hero.
I forcibly moved my facial expression I hadn't changed in a long wile, and formed a stiff smile to the magician's bewildered air.

"Because it's… for the sake of the world."

If I have the power to save it, if my own power can be of the least amount of use to something, if you're going to give me a reason to exist, then I'll sacrifice myself to it.

That's what my child's mind thought. That's all there was to it.
I'll throw out my worthless self, throw out my vague standing in life, throw away the idleness I felt from my own ignorance… as if I was just tossing aside some trash on the side of the road, I was able to discard it all so easily. That's all there was to it.

Even if I didn't know how to read or write, I understood.

It wasn't for my dear ones, or my parents, or lover, or friends, and of course, it wasn't for the world. It was plain and simple… self-satisfaction.

From the eyes covered under the hood, water started to flow.
So even magicians weep. I ended up thinking something useless like that.

"… You will surely become a wonderful, and… tragic hero. Serge, I can do nothing but commend that courage of yours."

What the magician gave name to was nothing like courage, but seeing that selfless smile on her face, I kept my mouth shut.
The magician's hand gave off a faint light. To me, it was the first time I had ever seen magic, and it looked like the work of God.

The lights quietly poured down over my head. It was as she were covering me with a hat of it. And what existed in that flow was a power strong enough to stir up my existence.

"For your strong and noble will, I grant the Class of『Hero』onto you. Serge. I pray for light on… the path you are to travel."

"… Yes."

Her words stained the insides of my mind along with that power.
My senses understood. It was likely something powerful. Surpassing the bounds of humanity, a powerful Mana of light to overwhelm the Demon Race. My soul was written over. As one to light the dark.
If you were going to give out something like this, then anyone… even a civilian could be a Hero. Even I could do it.

What is this… so effort and talent… had nothing to do with it.
Compared to the power granted by the『Hero』Class, all the effort I had ever put in, and those classmate, upperclassmen, lowerclassmen I had always been jealous of equally… felt like nothing but rubbish.

And on that truth, I felt a great sense of guilt.

Power I gained by cheating. My heart gave a dull ache.
What a terrible tale it must be.

"Now, Serge. Please go forth. With that power… to clear away the darkness. To save the world. Here, from this moment forth… you are a Hero, Serge."

"… Yes."

Hero. Serge the Hero.
It doesn't really feel real. No, I don't need it to. I mean, it's not like I actually wanted to become a Hero in the first place.

The inside of my head was incomparably clearer than ever before, and my body unbelievably light.
The power to clear the dark. I knew how to use my power by instinct.
Within my head floated the Brave Skilltree. The tree with all the powers of a hero loaded into it.
From one to one hundred, the Skilltree that had every slot on it opened from the start. I instinctively selected thhe final Skill on it.

A light descended from the sky, drawn to my left hand, before it began to take shape.
I felt no heat from it. It was a light that was only cold.

The『Brave』Skill Tree.
What existed at its depths, the weapon of a Hero. A Skill to bring forth a Holy Sword.

『Luster』.

It was a slender long sword. Its pale blue body was about one meter in length, and its design-less boorish hilt rested in my hand.
The Holy Sword I produced by expending an amount of Mana I wouldn't even have felt if I were as I was before obtaining the Hero Class was simply beautiful… and cold.

The Holy Sword. Its name surfaced in my mind… Solitus Argentum.

(TL: Latin, Solitary Silver)

Light reflected off the blade with a lonely name perfectly suited of me, making it shine silver.
In the center of it, light, wind gathered, and gave blessings to the sword. The magician merely stared up at that sword in a trance, and at that moment, I felt the truth of my role as a Hero for the first time.

I hung out the blade's tip towards the heavens. A holy pillar of light rose from it.
In my new life, reborn as a Hero, I couldn't help but think a little.

If I'm the Hero, I wonder if I can make any friends.

Part 2: What's Necessary isn't Power, but Courage

… I failed.

I had been too lacking in caution due to my place in the sky. When I manipulated the wings on my back to charge with all my might, I was easily dodged.
At the same time, I received an impact great enough to crush my skull.

Demons are strong. Especially in the miasma of the Demon World, they were able to gain extraordinary powers. It's completely different from fighting them on the surface, or in the heavens.

Once they reached the highest rank… Demon Lord, I wonder how strong that would be.

I thought I had understood it.
I mean, it wasn't my first time fighting a Demon or a Demon Lord.
I've defeated a number of them A number of them fell.
I never thought I could deceive the wide ranged perception abilities of a Demon Lord. The surprise attack I launched with the premise that they knew it would be coming was brilliantly evaded, and I was smashed.

Strong. Within my fading field of vision, I thought.
On top of it all, this enemy hadn't gotten serious at all. As if it were a part of their daily life, they activated a Skill with natural movements, and without even any killing intent, they naturally intercepted me.
I can't even imagine how many months and years they had placed into their strength. But there was quite a bit of menace packed into that single blow of theirs.

The moment I realized my failure, what flowed out from my heart wasn't fear… an anxiety great enough to crush me.
With my vision smashed, and my five senses fading, my mind dripped out, and my soul well into darkness…

… And a Skill activated.

My memories flashed back through me.
My limits as a Hero. My defeat. Being picked up by God, and made a Valkyrie. The power I devoted my life to. The power I devoted myself to defeat Demons. The Power I devoted myself to destroy them.

On the『Question』that came up in my mind, I selected『Yes』without hesitation.

My breath returned. Light came back to my world. My smashed head, and burst brain, and my split body, and any and everything else returned to normal.
A rewind from death. No matter how many tens and hundreds and thousands of times I got a taste of it, it was an unfathomable sensation I could never accustom myself to.

Power reentered my body. I slowly stood up.

The large shadow looked down over me. Golden eyes observing me. That calm giant stood stagnant like a pillar of rock.
And of all else, he was greater than any Demon I had faced thus far, and his reaction as he looked at the scene surely wasn't that of one seeing revival for the first time.

The Demon was a mountainous bald man, whose body height exceeded two meters. His brown skin was draped over a great armor of muscle coating his entire body. The way he held himself was closer to humanity than any other Demon K had seen before. I didn't see him to be holding any weapons, but with that body of his, perhaps such a thing was unnecessary.
The greatest thing for me to focus on was that, despite us being a mere two meters apart, I couldn't feel a single hint of power from him.
A Demon's power is high. Originally, I could detect them instinctively from quite a distance. If that opponent was to be an exceptional Demon Lord, then I could even feel it kilometers away.

No matter which of the seven sins a Demon was to reign over, that should hold true.
But the Demon before my eyes was a type I'd never seen before. I had nothing in my

knowledge to indicate the ability to completely erase one's presence.
If I had acted without prior information, and without adequate caution, I wouldn't have even noticed this man's existence.

Is this man… what God had feared of… the calamity?

Before the unidentified man, I held up my Holy Sword.
That would have been a favorable chance for him to give a followup attack, but the man didn't move his body at all. He folded his arms, and looked down on me, those golden eyes letting off a fiery radiance. A heavy pride clung to his mouth.

"… I see, that sword is… so you're Serge Serenade… I never thought the real one would show up… why must everything always go astray."

"… Hah!"

I have no words… to exchange with a Demon.

I sucked in a short breath, and gave the ground a strong kick
I poured power into the Holy Sword.
The blade was one imbued with high divinity. The strongest sword in the wor… no, perhaps just the strongest of the Human Race. But still, Demons that climbed up to the surface were one thing, but it wasn't imbued with the power to kill a Demon in the Demon World with a single stroke.

That's why I have to put power, Mana into it. In a time so far back I can't even remember when it occurred, it was what I once laid hands on as a human, Hero's power.
The pale blue edge was clad in a pale light. It was an armament to cut down darkness. The power that the frail human race had devoted itself to in order to stand against Demons. A sword of light to repell all sadness to befall them.

The Demon Lord didn't move.
As I thrust the tip forward with the intent to rend him toward that Lord's trunk of a body… towards the area with the highest probability of containing his Soul Core, the left of his chest, one of his log-like arms easily knocked the blade aside.
The blade lightly cut into his flesh.
Jet-black blood scattered, and before that could fall to the ground, he embedded his foot into my solar plexus.

My breath was knocked out. My internal organs were hollowed out. My brain let out a scream.
My body that had been strengthened as an Angel, the defensive barrier surrounding it was shattered in an instant, and an unpleasant creaking sound from my own bones reached my ears. My field of vision blinked on and off, before the pain tinted all before me pitch black.
For a few seconds, my body danced in the air, before I was thrown onto the ground. My entire body hurt from the pressure of the impact.
It hurts. I'm in pain. I'm scared. He's strong. I ignored all those notions going through my mind, and thought.

I couldn't see the instant he moved. Normally, in the moment an enemy made a move, I could see a small waver in their being, but I saw none of that at all. He was simply too fast.

He’s strong. The three Demon Lords I defeated were nothing compared to this.
I can’t even see where to start. The difference in power between us was hopeless. My dynamic vision was unable to follow him at all. And of all else, a Skill to erase his presence is… too abnormal.

“… u…”

I barely managed to swallow down the scream forming at the back of my throat.
I allocate the parts of my mind heading in a negative direction from the pain and power gap towards analyzing my resources on hand. That was, in all the years I’ve fought on, the method of fighting I’d cultivated to keep fighting without having my heart fold in on me.

Just as there were different types among Angels, the Skills a Demon could use varied by the Sins they governed. With pure physical abilities this high, speed beyond my perception, and the ability to pierce a barrier with his bare hands…
From that blow, there was but a single sin I could surmise that he held.

Superbia.
Among the various sorts of Demons around, it was the type that required the most caution.

I didn’t『Die』, so the pain won’t go away. The option isn’t coming up in my head.

He’s going easy on me. My magically strengthened body, and the barrier of an Angel, before this Demon, they were no more than walls of paper. I’ll bet he had enough power to turn me into a lump of meat in a single blow if he was up to it.

In that case, it would be a lot easier on me if he just killed me…

On the non-fatal damage assailing my body, I started to go through all options I had to preserve my continued existence, and at that moment, the man raised his voice.
Fitting his stature, it was a voice like a subterranean rumble. But opposed to that thunderous tone of his, the contents held some intelligence. That was one of the reasons Demons were something more than simple beasts.

“That authority is… 『Fortis』 I see… a troublesome one it is… no…”

The wrinkles on his brow smoothed out, and his frowning expression warped.
His voice wasn’t leaving him anymore, but he was quite clearly showing scorn.

What is he scoffing at? If he laughing at me for trying to attack knowing full well the gap between us?
No, there’s no way I’d ever understand a Demon’s thoughts.

I confirmed my damage. There was still some pain left across my body, but it won’t influence any offensive actions. In the first place, the option of retreat never existed.
I used my sword like a cane to lift myself.
My knees trembled. My arms shook. I stopped the quivering across my body, and stood up. I had no choice but to stand.

Hero was the general term to refer to those that opposed the dark. Therefore, as long as a darkness to oppose stands before me, and my own soul is undying, I must strongly impose myself on it.

… Because if I don't… I won't be able to fight on.

"It's useless. Your power will never reach… me."

I won't reach. I know.
I could feel it from a single blow. Even if I didn't measure his power by the disparity in our Mana, I knew well enough of the gap between us. Of all else, this Demon Lord is… simply too fast.

But still…

I remembered the days of battle I had spent.
There was never an enemy within them that wasn't strong. I had always fought with my life at risk.
Since descending back into this Demon World, the three Lords I took on were all strong and troublesome existences holding desires strong enough to paint out all existence.

What's necessary isn't power, but courage. As long as that doesn't run out, my defeat is… unthinkable.

I concentrated power to my eyes, and send malice and fighting spirit towards the Lord whose name I had yet to learn.

Black soil, dark emotions, and a miasma full of stagnant air, yet within that my blood and soul cried out. My spirit was excited.
On the edge of the horizon are three more great presences. They're undoubtedly Demon Lord Class. I have no idea for what reason such a number of them have gathered.
I don't know, but within my perpetual existence, within all the battle experience I had built up, I had a premonition that I was diving in to the longest battle I've ever faced.

Surprisingly enough, even when I directed my intent to kill at this Demon Lord, he still shows no will to fight. That reaction I had never witnessed from any Demon of Superbia thus far was too ominous to bear.

… I'm scared.

"… It doesn't seem you understand, 『Fortis』. Courage and recklessness are… different things entirely."

The Demon Lord sneered.

『Fortis』

The name of the authority I gained the moment I became a Valkyrie after my death. One of the Virtues governed by Angels.
He saw through that just by locking blades with me twice!?
… No… that's wrong. What's to be feared the most is that, even after inferring it, the Lord had yet to lose his composure.

Still with a brilliant smile on his face, his figure leisurely swayed. That brown body,

that large build started jiggling about like a Slime, before it dissolved away.
The sudden fear send shivers down my spine. While his head had already disappeared, that voice continued to ring out.

"No matter how you may try to prove that brave heart of yours, no matter how many tnousands of times you're prevailed with it… it's all… meaningless. Serge Serenade. Valkyrie, Valkyrie, is it… ah…"

I cannot comprehend. On the unknown that didn't correspond with any of the experience I'd built up over my life, my hands shook.

That muddily oozing body flowed over onto the ground, and as if it were an illusion, it vanished entirely.
From top down, that large build surpassing two meters had melted, and within it… a body three times smaller revealed itself.
She was full of openings. I knew that, but I couldn't take my eyes off the one who emerged from the giant.

"Eh… that can… 't be…"

My breath stopped.

Upon the destruction of that muscular mass, what came out was… a young girl.
Even when my own stature wasn't that high, she was considerably smaller than me. Unbefitting her petite build, her features were quite mature. A sharp glare, and an excessively bulging chest.
White skin, and golden eyes. On her back grew five sets of dark wings, and from her head grew platinum blond hair that reached all the way to her feet.
What she wrapped around that body looked like nothing more than unornamented, colorless old rags, but while there were some differences here and there… that figure, and presence was something I could never mistake.

… In the distant past, it was an honorable form I had happened upon before.

I only saw her for an instant. A single short moment. In the depths of my memory, behind the haze of things forgotten, all that remained of my recollection of her was that brief scene.
In my life much longer than a normal human, where a majority of my memories had been long buried, what I could still remember was… when I was brought to the heavens by the Valkyries… the moment right after.
It's likely that the other party never took me to sight. She likely doesn't remember. It's because we never even exchanged words. It's because our statuses and powers were too far removed for something on the level of conversation to be permitted.

… But I remembered. From that single glance, a powerful charisma that burned itself into my soul.

Those ten wings of light.
Of all those that enforced Iustitia in all the heavens, she was one of the scarce Sacred Lords that could be counted on two fingers.
A Lord of Lords. One who was granted the fruit of glory by the supreme God of the celestial realm.

The jet black pointed tail she hadn't grown back then slapped messily against the

ground.

"How can this… why are… you…"

"As I thought, so you've scene this form of mine before… Ku ku ku, should I call it a strange twist of fate…"

There was a difference. The Angel I had looked up at back then had wings that glimmered as if they were light itself that had taken shape. Her eyes weren't gold, but a clear emerald greed. She didn't have a tail either.
But if you looked at it the other way, besides those traits, not a single thing had changed. Her face, her body, her height, tone, expression. That blazing power that could scorch one at a glance hadn't faded at all, no matter how many hundreds of thousands of years had passed.

… No, that's wrong.
There's no way that's true!

I shook my head, and mustered up my courage.
The girl before me is one blessed by the vice of a Demon. One who would creep unseen through the shadows of the hearts of man, to devour their souls.

Word by word, I asked as if I was posing the question to myself.

"That can't… be. What trickery is this… Demon Lord. Why have you chosen to take up such a form at this point in time…?"

"Hmm… interesting. You're an interesting one, Valkyrie. Having seen this form, and knowing my name, you still maintain the willpower to stand before me…"

Quite different from before the girl scoffed at me in a gentle voice like the ringing of sleigh bell. Her lips curved, and her right hand directed itself at me.
That was her activation nose. Without any warning, without a single movement of Mana, light poured out. Enough to cloud over my eyes, an untainted white light.

Forgetting the burning sensation in my eyes, I unintentionally opened them ever wider. It was a Skill I was accustomed to, but that's exactly why I couldn't believe it.
The meaning behind it caused my body to quiver.

The overflowing light took shape, and in her hand, a single sword was created.
With the hilt, the blade and all else forged of a shadowless white, a straight sword.
Among the authorities granted to Angels, it was the power most specialized in bringing ruin to Demons.

The『Iustitia』Authority.
A Skill to manifest a sword of light to dispel the dark.

『Sin Breaker』

The point of the sword that looked to have been delicately folded out of light itself was directed at me. Normally, it was a sword of justice that would never have found its way to be pointed there.
On the pressure that shortened my breath, I instinctively held my Holy Sword aloft.
By assuming a stance for battle, the shaking across my body came to a stop. But the sway of my emotions wasn't so conveniently ceased.

I have the greater reach, but something like that… doesn't matter if I can't hit her.

"The real… deal?"

Still, even when confronting her, what formed at my mouth was a question.

In contrast, my opponent's lips only returned a smile.

This is no good. Even if I found myself asking it, I already knew the answer.
This woman before my eyes was undoubtedly the genuine article. This pressure, that form. No matter what illusions she were to use, it would be impossible to replicate it to this extent.

A true Angel… no, former Angel.
Holding the name of Glory, one of the heavenly messengers closest to God.
The glory that kneeled beside the throne.

Gloria Seidthroan.

"I'm also short on time, but, ku ku ku, how… pitiful. I'll play with you just a bit. Think it an honor for your body to be receiving my blade."

"You are… no, you should be dead…"

At the very least, that's what I'd heard.
In a time an uncountable number of years passed, against the greatest army of the Demon World's forces, she commanded all the forces under her command, and managed to repel them, but after confronting the enemy's Demon Lord, her whereabouts were lost. As she never returned, she was proclaimed dead.

The death of a high class Lord made quite an echo through heaven. I remember it. No, there's no way I could forget.
Due to the outcome of that battle, the war was brought to a temporary armistice.

I have no idea as to why she became a Demon.
In the first place, as I never associated with her, I only knew of her personality and bearing from hearsay. All I knew for sure was how extraordinary her power had been.

Do I have… any chances of victory?
… No, at the very least, I can't go down before our blades have even locked once.
With all the power I could muster, I glared.

I built up my courage.
I remembered the reason I had been sent to the Demon World by God.
The appearance of a powerful Demon of prophecy. The birth of a calamity.
And… for some reason, the one with the highest possibility of being able to take care of it was me.

A Fallen Angel who once stood at the summit of all Angels. I doubt there's a calamity greater than this.
I can't leave this Lord to run free.

In that overwhelming pressure, I wrung out even more courage from the depths of my heart. I used it to coat over my fear.
The heroic power I cultivated in my battles as a Hero. That Fortis authority I laid

hands on when I became a Valkyrie.

It's fine, it's fine.
As long as I have both of them, my defeat is… impossible.
I put power in my arms, the power of my soul. The Holy Sword was clad in an even greater light, and let off a silver blue glimmer.

And the moment I held that sword allot…

A familiar message came up in my mind.

『Serge Serenade has Died. Cause of Death: Decapitation』

My vision suddenly went dark.
I couldn't move myself in the slightest.
What had transpired, what did she do? I couldn't understand any of it. I couldn't even perceive it. There wasn't even… any pain to be felt.
A followup window faded into view.

『Do you want to try again?』

『YES / NO』

I can't move my body. My five senses have already gone out. Within that nothingness, the message alone was all I could perceive.
The answer was… already determined.

Light returned to my eyes again. The hands that had unconsciously began to predd down on my wounds… came to a stop.
Gloria's Sin Breaker was artlessly smeared with a slight hint of red.

The message. I should have been cut. I should have been killed.
Even so… now, I can't even tell what part of me was injured.

"So you revived… were you able to follow that attack? Fortis… truly troublesome, and a truly worthless authority."

"…"

My body could move perfectly.
Not even the pain that had afflicted me before I was cut remained.
I swallowed some air. I narrowed my eyes, and observed every one of her movements. I held my sword, and took a step forward.

『Serge Serenade has Died. Cause of Death: Blunt Force Trauma』

My eyes went pitch black again. It was a feeling of loss great enough to swallow my soul.
I instinctively gave my response to the message that came out.

And I felt the light again.
Gloria was a mere few meters away. If there was nothing to obstruct me, it was a space I could span in the blink of an eye.

"… Serge, what did you even come here for?"

"!?"

Black again.
Cause of Death: Decapitation.

I can't see. I couldn't see her sword. I couldn't even see its afterimage.
No matter how much effort I put in, I wasn't able to see any of it. The Gloria of my vision had always just been standing as she was. She hadn't done a thing. That's all it looked to me.

"Could it be that you're under the delusion that as long as you keep having a go at it endlessly, you'll eventually win?"

It went black. The speed was too fast.
My blackouts and revivals. It was like a flickering lantern.
And every time, I would spam YES whenever that question was to come up.
I can't see anything. I can't hear anything. I'm scared. My senses are going cold, and this feeling of nihility is much too great.

I compelled myself to keep reviving. Without permitting myself even a moment of waver, I forced myself to come back.

What's necessary was never power, but a heart that couldn't be crushed. Just as when I was human, no matter what fear, no matter what enemy I stood to face… courage. Brave Heart.
I rejected the deathful feeling of all my body's heat being robbed away.

Right. Courage.
As long as that doesn't break, my defeat is… impossible.

"Brave Heart. That only Skill granted to Angels that govern Fortis. With you power, no matter how many tens of thousands of times you're to revive yourself, Heard aside, you'll never even match up to Kanon or Zebul."

I let her provocations slide passed.

The moment I revived I retreated a stem. But even then… black again.
It wasn't just once, each time the Cause of Death was displayed as Decapitation. The red staining the jet black earth was gradually growing thicker.
There's no doubt I'm being cut at. There's no doubt about that, but…

My field of vision slowly swayed. I'm not sure if that was because I was on the verge or collapsing, or because of this crushing pressure I felt on myself.
Give up on life. Death is the inevitable result. That thought started growing in my head.

There was just one thing Gloria was wrong about.
Yes, the power bestowed upon Fortis Angels was unlimited resurrection. As long as the soul, as long as one's courage doesn't break, then the『Brave Heart』Skill was one that promised victory. And that's all Fortis Angels were given.

Many months and years have passed since I became a Valkyrie, and attained that authority. I don't have any fear of death left anywhere within me.
My hazy vision. As if I was being swept about by the waves, this unreliable sense or

reality.
The speed at which I died was much too fast. It was so swift that I didn't even have the time to feel any pain, and that was my only saving grace.
I revived, and in the slight moment before I died again, I poured some power into the sword in my right hand.

The Mana I could pour into it during that brief instant was truly small. But it was surely accumulating within my blade.

"… I guess you're not going to die off so easily… If I had the time, I'd personally sing your requiem, but…"

Gloria stopped her hand. From the start, she seemed to be concerned about time. I wonder what she's so worried about.
But it's my chance. In that moment, I poured my all into my Holy Sword. The blade received my will, and cloaked itself in a greater light. It was no longer some faint glimmer, but a definite darkness-destroying Sword of Light.

I directed the tip towards Gloria, towards the Demon who was once the aspiration of all Angels.
Even if this body is to fall apart, the will imbued in my sword will never go out.

Regardless of what speed she may boast, what power she carries… she cannot avoid the light.
The energy gathered within my Holy Sword compressed in an instant, and converged at the end of the sword.

Without a single twitch of her brow, Gloria stared at the shimmering sword.

… And I let out my power as a Hero, the power that had taken down all darkness in my path.

Part 3: I won't… Lose

Heroes are but weapons.
Once chosen, they were given an expansive amount of Mana, and the ability to turn that into pure destructive Energy. They were human-shaped weapons to turn all creation to ash.
They were the weapon the human race devised to destroy any enemy that stood before them. The Holy Sword was nothing more than one of their methods to carry that out.

By its pure simplicity, it held no weakness, and therefore it had the power to destroy both Light and Dark equally.
The light cleared.
The inside my mouth was parched. Even when I hadn't died yet, I couldn't breathe. My throat was blocked up.

"Well, well, well, it seems you've still yet to understand…"

"Eh… why…"

After the light was dispelled, what was revealed was Gloria standing with the exact same expression as before.
Her body, and those tattered rags she wrapped around herself as clothes weren't damaged at all.

That isn't… possible.
I'm sure it was a direct hit. Gloria hadn't moved a single step.
A decapitating blow at an unperceivable ungodly speed. That truly was fearsome. Bu this one… far surpassed my prior shock.

Superbia.

Of all a Demon's Seven sins, it held a high offensive potential, and an overwhelming level of Speed.
If so, then what is with that defensive capability? If I had failed to kill her from too low an output, I could accept it, but…

A single blow with all the power of a Hero… the power that had brought ruin to three Demon Lords before. It's surely impossible for her to be unscratched. Unthinkable.

… Like this, it's as if she's not a Superbia, but a…

『Serge Serenade has Died. Cause of Death: Decapitation』

My mind went white. On the display that suddenly popped up, my response was a beat later than before, but I somehow managed to select YES again.

I revived. Around me spread a vast empty ground. I used my left hand to prop myself up, and rose. There aren't any followup attacks coming gown on me.

"It looks like you want to ask 'why,' Valkyrie."

Gloria's expression, her features that had been put in place like a fine work, were slightly bent.
I'm not sure if the reason behind that face of hers was hatred, or perhaps compassion.

"If you had been placed under my charge, I would have trained you up from the ground again… but, you're not bad, I guess."

I had let out all the power stored in the sword. A second shot will take some time.
But without even jumping at that opportunity, she let out calm, and knowing words.

No, I doubt she even had to wait for a chance from the start. In the past few minutes, I don't even know how many tens or hundreds or thousands of times I've been killed. That's how big the difference in power was between us.
I gradually began replenishing my power. The time I need is around ten seconds.
There's no way a former Angel didn't know about that, but as I thought, her expression didn't change.

"Hey, Valkyria. Do you not know of it? No, there's no way you're oblivious. The『Superbia』authority, the power to『Overrule』all things in creation."

"…!!"

Recharge complete. I concentrated every nerve in my body to fire it off again.
As expected, Gloria showed no signs of dodging. The air distorted, and the destructive energy tore through the wind, as it swallowed up her small body.
But in response to that, all that returned were some disinterested words.

"… So you really don't get it. There's no way I'll be defeated by you. No, it precisely because it's me, that there's no reason for me to lose. I don't even have to dodge. Serge Serenade, why is it that you, a mere 『Valkyrie』, the lowest possible rank of Angel, believe that your attack can get through to a former Saint Lord Class like Gloria Seidthroan?"

I cannot listen. It's all a fabrication. She's just trying to break my heart.
But it's not as if I had a chance to cover my ears, so those words jolted my brain.

But from the battle theory that I had forged over countless experience, I was quickly able to discern her meaning.

『Overrule』

Of course, I knew of it. It was a Pride Demon's prideful way of dealing with things.
… And it included the power to nullify powers they thought of as beneath them.

"Ah… eh…"

Certainly, if you go by that logic, then all of my attacks would… just be nullified by her Overrule.

"… Eh? Then…"

"Even if you repeated one hundred million attacks, that blade will never reach me."

With eyes as if she was lecturing an incompetent student, Gloria declared as such.

It wasn't a problem of output, but of principle.
It was law. Just as water was to flow towards the earth, my attacks were never to get through to this woman.

My vision went dark again.
It wasn't just an illusion. The message displayed before my eyes was proof of that.
Within that darkness, the floating YES and NO.

All of my attacks will simply fall flat?
I definitely cannot win?
My base attack power, and speed. The effort I piled up, and the power I'd tempered. Our base statuses as Demons and Angels were too far apart. It was hopeless.

After staring at those words for several tens of seconds, I…

Slowly, timidly selected YES.
Light came to my eyes once more. With the same fed-up expression as before, she was there to greet me.

You won't die? … How incorrigible. Is that courage, or thoughtlessness…"

"…"

That piercing glare, and the feelings of scorn contained in it.
I swallowed up the fear extending from my feet, and the basic fear I felt as a warrior.

… I won't lose.
My defeat is unthinkable. Impossible. My inability to understand when to give up was the only thing that never lost out.
The moment I became a Hero, I had already resolved myself to swallow down all feelings of loss.
If something of this extent… were to make me accept defeat, I would never have been called to Heaven, nor would I have become a Hero.

My breathing had been cut off for a while. My own tension, and the intimidating air Gloria let out stiffened my body.
Even when I should have fully recovered, I felt it difficult to move.

Within my mouth, I wordlessly encouraged myself.
I had always been fighting alone. No matter how hopeless the challenge, I took them on.

I can win. I won't lose. There's no such thing as absolute. Yeah, that's right. If giving up means death, then I am immortal. I'll come back no matter how many tens or hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands of times it takes. I'll destroy you.
Serge, you're strong. Strong. Strong. Stronger than anyone.

Overrule?
That surely is powerful. At Demon Lord Level, overcoming that is close to impossible by normal means.
But there should be some way around it.
No, the very fact that she needs to use Overrule to render my attacks useless means that if she didn't use it, it would be possible for me to inflict damage on her. That fact I was able to give her a slight cut on my first attack is proof of that.

… With all things taken into account, it's not like she has defensive capabilities to get out of everything without a scratch.

I've a countless number of experiences of having defeated Demons of Pride. I even know their weaknesses.

The countermeasures for Superbia.
The greatest one is… having them feel fear.
As Gloria recognizes me as an existence below her own, I need to give a Skill with an output enough to threaten her, and make her wary.

I licked my dry lips, and got my breath in order. I calmed my pulse, and sharpened my awareness.
Gloria's unbelievable beautiful eyes of gold continued jeering intently at me.
The emotion within them was contempt. The way one with absolute strength would look down on a lesser being.

I bit my lip, and shut off the incessant ringing of my instincts not to fight the one before me.
I pretended not to notice my fright. I fooled my own heart. All the way to now, that's

how I always fought. Back when I was human, and there henceforth. Fear was my enemy, and my friend.

I clenched the hand holding my sword. What I need is my attack with the highest firepower. An attack with the sword itself would be best.
I stored all my energy into it, and instead of emitting it, I collected it around the edge… I'll cut her up directly.

Normally, actually hitting her with a swing of this sword would be the most difficult option, but right now, this woman is being negligent.
And in that, there was a small, ridiculously small chance for my victory. And as long as there's a chance… I won't break.

But at that moment, the moment where I stepped forward for the sake of that slim piece of hope, Gloria curled her face into a smile.

"Still… that power… even if it isn't to get through to me, perhaps it may work on that man… but I've no time to paint her my colors…"

Gloria's wings opened up wide.
Those ten appendages were likely the vestiges of back when she was an Angel. Something one wouldn't find on any ordinary Demon.
They fluttered a little, and her body gently rose into the sky.

"Struggle all you want… just how far will that power of yours go… how far can you prove your recklessness on these lands…"

My thoughts took a turn.
She's running away. Can my wings catch up?
It's no good. She's running away. If I want to kill her, this is my last chance. There's a high probability the speed of those wings of hers exceeds mine.
There's no way I can catch her if she takes flight.

Those spread wings of darkness. Unlike when she was an Angel, their form and color had become much more sinister.

I took a step forward. I took to the sky. I kicked the air. I brandished my sword. Gloria's body moved. My target vanished from my sight. She appeared again ten meters to my side.
It's no good, I still can't see her. Even in the air, those movements of hers were still in good health. I have no means to give chase.

She's running away. No, perhaps I'm the one being spared? They're both the same.
By the time I noticed it, the words were coming out of my mouth. It wasn't to buy some time, but out of honest curiosity.
Always alone, I barely let my voice out since coming to the Demon World. The sound I let out after all this time was terribly cracked.

"Wait, Gloria! Please, answer me one thing!"

That Angel was surely one of the brightest stars in the sky.
A single holy Angel, who embraced strong trust from God.
A woman who earned much reverence from her brethren. Enough that, when we never even talked, she remained firm in my memory, a woman whose names wrung

across the Heavens.

And why…

"Why are you alive!? I'm certain that you were…"

Without waiting for me to finish, she climbed up higher and higher.
I didn't follow, but simply looked up, and shouted.

"… felled in a battle against a mighty Demon Lord."

Gloria Stopped.
In a brief moment, her expression underwent a complete change.
Her eyes were directed at me once more.

"… What?"

… From a crooked smile, to an expressionless face. An expression I had never seen before.

"Demon… Lord…? Felled in… a battle with… a Demon Lord…?"

Her frightened voice rung out higher than the heavens. Her small form blurred.

My breath became short. Those golden eyes appeared before my eyes, and finally, I realized I was being clasped up by the neck.
But the one who had lost their composure wasn't me… but the woman before me.
Black emotions swirled in the depths of her pupils. Disorder, or perhaps hatred.

"A Demon Lord, you say!? What nonsense, at the time, Heard Lauder was…"

"Herd… loader…?"

The bones of my neck let out a creaking sound. I can't breathe at all.
I'm going to die. I'm going to be killed. My neck's going to be wrung out to death. My field of vision flickered on and off, and my soul raised a wail.

Within that uncollected consciousness, I thought about the meaning of those words.
It was a name I had some recollection of.
A name on that list of powerful Demons that had been circulating about heaven.
A Superbia Demon who held the epithet of the Prideful Kaiser. He stood at the forefront of the army, and slayed a number of Angels. An infamous Demon.

But that's wrong. That's not how it is. It's different from the rumors I've heard.
In the first place, there's too much a difference between a General Class Demon, and a Saint Lord Angel. Even more so with the Angel commander being the greatest anti-Demon Iustitia Angel. Even if they came with an army of Demons, such a difference wasn't so easily overturned in a head-on battle.

But at the same time, it was the talk of the town back in heaven. That's why I remember it well.

Gloria Seidthroan engaged in battle with the army of the Lord of Depravity.
She was able to repel the General Demon leading their main forces, but…

“What does this… mean? I lost to… a Demon Lord? I. Was. Defeated!?”

My body was swung around. It was as if she was a child throwing a tantrum.

More than me, the woman herself was much more confused.
She was letting out the presence I couldn’t sense at all before. That smothering atrocious presence of a Demon Lord saddened me, in proving well enough that the woman before me was no longer a Lord of Angels.
A chance.
If I were to attack right now, wouldn’t the damage get through? I tried to lift the hand clasped around my sword, but I couldn’t put any power into it. Angels and Demons didn’t require respiration all too much, but even so, the throat was still a single vital point.

With all my might, I glared at her. But while Gloria’s eyes seemed poised in my direction, she wasn’t looking at me.
It was a hollow glance as if she were staring into a world of dreams.

Why… just what is it that she’s seeing…?

Suddenly, the crushing feeling about my neck disappeared. Power returned to my body.

Losing my support, I began to plummet, but before I hit the ground, I managed to move my wings, and raise myself.
I took a deep breath, and corrected my posture. When I had gotten myself in order, a bizarre spectacle entered my eyes.

“Ah… no, nonsense… wha… this power is…”

Frozen in midair, Gloria’s eyes were wide open.
But that position of hers was my chance.
Her wings weren’t moving at all. No, more than that, it looked like her entire body had been glued fast to space. As if there was something locking her to the air.

But the strangest thing of all was… her face.
Without surprise, without scorn, her expression was surely… what one would call impatient.
The words flowing out of her mouth were the emotions of rage she had never directed at me, even as I held a blade against her.

Her golden irises seemed to be searching for something, as they made large swaying motions.

And Gloria’s body shot off.
Without even moving her wings, she started gliding down diagonally with fearsome momentum, collided with the ground head-on, and bounced a couple of times before coming to a halt.
No, rather than gliding, she crashed and burned.

Raising a cloud of dust, she crashed, but she immediately corrected her stance, and landed properly, before lifting herself into the air again.
The hair that reached all the way to her feet was standing on end, and as if something had grasped her, she floated aimlessly around space.

It was a scene I had never seen before. An unknown phenomenon.
I mean, for a Demon who could easily brush off all attacks, and moved at ungodly speeds unperceivable by the eye, who would think she would let herself be grasped like that?
Gloria's eyes were locked on empty space. There was absolutely nothing in that direction, but her gaze was surely seeing something.

"I see… so it was you who…"

Without finishing her sentence, her body began to rotate with her hair at the fulcrum, before she flew off again. This time, it wasn't to the ground, but parallel to it. As if that small frame of hers was a bullet leaving its chamber, she shot forth, and raised a tuft of smoke at the horizon.

What was that phenomenon… wait, phenomenon?
No, that's wrong. Gloria was definitely directing her words at someone.
It was without a doubt that her actions held intent. She was trying to attack something.

I remained vigilant. But within the web of my perception, I could only capture the three large swaying powers a few kilometers away, and a number of smaller forces, a flock of Demons coming closer.
Even at the moment Gloria flew off, I couldn't see anyone around me.

An invisible enemy… no, a long distanced assault?
An enemy launched an attack on Gloria, but nothing on me. I don't get their standards.
I can't see. I can't see anything. It wasn't something like Gloria's speed that exceeded my dynamic vision.
Built on a different principle than Pride, a power of invisibility.

… That power didn't align with any of the abilities I had learned about in Heaven.

And to the one who took it on… even Gloria herself seemed to be in an abnormal state.

"LEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIGGGGGGG
GIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIE!!! WHAAATT'S THE MEANING OF THIS YOU BAAAAAASSSSTTTTTAAAAAAAAAARD!!!"

That voice of resentment that seemed to come straight from the depths of hell made the air shake.
Like the howling of a beast. Despite having been blown across the horizon, Gloria returned before my sight in an instant, and a following her, a delayed strong wing swept over the scenery.
While there was some black dirt staining her joints, there weren't any notable wounds on her body.

But her eyes had completely snapped.
The face of a devil. Her pupils had opened completely, as she glared in every direction to find this unseeable enemy.
Her power had completely been freed from its previous concealment, and her idiotically high Mana stirred up the miasma, scattering pebbles left and right.

As if a curtain had been lowered over it, the world grew darker.
Perhaps noticing this abnormality, the three large clashing forces put their movements on hold.

My thoughts haven't caught up the present situation. I don't know. I don't know anything. I've too little information.
There's no doubt it's the work of some third party. But I can't see their form. There must be a meaning to it. That's what Gloria, who's swinging around her malice left and right goes to prove.

It must be…

Sensing something Gloria gave her wings a large flap, and drew a spiral in the air, as she ascended higher and higher.
At just about the same time, the ground began to shake violently. If my legs had been on the land, I would have felt an unbearable earthquake.
Along with the tremors, some parts of the ground were projected up, and cracks began to spread.

"…"

After a few seconds, a strong wind began to blow. From up to down.
I struggled to fight against the bizarre wind flowing towards the land.

I looked up at the sky, kicked the air below, and moved my wings.
In my widened vision, the blood red blinding sun. A wide-open sky. Not a single cloud to be found.
I soared through the sky. To Angels, that was a natural action akin to breathing. After a few seconds, the wind ceased, and I looked back at the ground to understand the intent of the attack.

… No, the ground hadn't risen at all, it had caved.

Spreading many meters, indented soil as if it had been crushed underfoot.
I wonder what sort of Skill would have to be used to bring about such a result.
No, it it's just boring into the earth, then Gloria, and likely a majority of the other Demon Lords could do it. I'm sure I could as well.

The problem was, that I couldn't discern the means ot attack, and I couldn't see the form of the third party that had accomplished it anywhere.

A mysterious attack. A power to control the wind? No, if you think about the nature of the attack Gloria took on…

Right below me, Gloria stood on the land. Her attention was completely removed from me.

"S-show yourself… Leigie! Why, are you…!? All of this is your…"

Bloodshot eyes. Her expression held no disdain, and what it displayed was an anger close to madness. The Sin Breaker that had manifested in her hand was recklessly cutting countless lines in the air.
Out raced countless shockwaves of light. The air pressure senselessly rended the earth, and as if it were crying out, the wind played out a high pitched sound.

Those slashes flew out. A few of them came at me, but passed by my sides.
The reason they didn't hit was because they weren't something aimed at me. But if one of them had shifted just a little, I would have likely had my wings ripped off.

I was no longer in Gloria's eyes. No, there wasn't anything reflected in them.
Her screams and malice were certainly directed at something, but I couldn't see what.

There was only one thing I knew.
More calmly than even in this chaos. The theory I had always been reminded of made me issue my judgement. It's not like I haven't seen it play through enough times.
That was what Demons were. I felt an illusion of all the blood in my body freezing over, and shook my arms.

… There's always someone greater.

Without a doubt, there's someone higher.
One called Gloria, of the highest Rank of Angels, and now Gloria Seidthroan, one who held the authority of both an Angel and a Demon. There was someone much greater than she.
Otherwise, there's no way Gloria would display so much rage.

I'll run. I have to run. I have to report this.
Even if her characteristic may be Pride, with me falling so far behind her, the chances that I won't be a match for this new challenger are exceedingly high.
While that power has yet to be directed at me, I'll return to heaven, and report…

I moved my wings with all my might, and started rising up to the sky. The spiraling chaotic miasma to my back, I rapidly closed in on the sun. The wind I felt all over my body instantly dried off my cold sweat.

The point to connect the Demon World and Heaven wasn't a specific place.

I stopped one high in the air, and looked back down at the ground.
The small speck that was likely Gloria. The three Demon Lords I had been sensing for a while.
As I thought, even when I look from up high, I can't see any new enemy. I can't feel anything.

… But there was one thing I figured out.

"… This is…"

The attack's… identity.
No, I still don't know that. I have no idea where the attacker's authority lay.
But the marks left in the earth by coincidence or inevitability, had taken on a form I was familiar with.
Five long trenches, with a wide area connecting them… right, that center. There was one large cavity at the base of all of them. The hollowed out ground, and the slight differentiation of color made it all too clear. From the ground it was something too big to make out, but that form I hadn't expected was…

"… The palm… of a hand…!?"

An absurdly large palm.
It was as if I was seeing a dream. I widened my eyes, and climbed higher.

It's… big.

Its scale was off the charts, but I'm sure that's… the shape of a human hand. That caving I had been a witness to, that denting of the ground had… only been but a single finger. I can't think any of this is without meaning.
As I stared in a daze at the unexpected situation, the ground raised a tremor.
The remains of that attack dotted that black wasteland again and again. An intense sound, as if to indicate the end of the world, made me forget the thunderous wail of the wind racing past my ears.

If this truly is the work of a single lifeform's hand, then there's no doubt its weilder is large enough to reach for the heavens. Greater than any lifeform I've ever happened on before…
Compared to the marks left behind by it, both me and Gloria, with our statures of less than two meters, were nothing more than ants. The scale was too extreme.

Gloria's body was picked up, and was sent flying again. As she was shot off, she used her wings to correct her posture.
Now I can understand it. She truly was being thrown about. By invisible hands.

And taking the attacks, Gloria herself realized as well.
The blade she swung around absurdly was to counteract those hands.
And she wasn't doing that good of a job at it.

Whether it was possible or not to do anything about it was another story. Gloria should withdraw. She should flee. Whether there's a means or not, the way she flailed about meaninglessly no longer had any of the level-headed thought she displayed when taking me on.

I concentrated my eyes. It seems Gloria has yet to take any actual damage.
She was in distress trying to evade those unseeable, and wide-scoped attacks, but the blows from those hands didn't boast too much firepower. Regardless of how many times she took those attacks, there weren't any notable injuries on her body, and as a Demon Lord, her light wounds would heal in no time at all. It would likely take quite a long time for an end to be drawn to this.

A small waver was produced in my mindset for retreat.

What should I do?
Its identity was one thing, but I didn't know its objective.
With the size of that hand, unless there was a specific intent to avoid me, I should have been crushed as well.
The master of that power… is Gloria its only target?
Should I observe for a little longer?

Gloria and the hand's master. At the very least, there are two out there outside the recognition of heaven. A little, just a little is enough. I need as much information as possible.

I flapped my wings, and made it so I could run at any time.

At that moment, the responses from my perception disappeared.
For a brief while, the presences of the three Demon Lords that I always kept wary of in a corner of my mind went out, before appearing again. No, it wasn't just those three that had disappeared.

It had been but a short flicker. Just the blink of an eye, but the scenery before my eyes had, in the pause it took to go over a single comma, changed entirely.
What had made its abrupt appearance was a countless number of Demons. Besides Gloria, and those three Demon Lords, a flock of Demons below Demon Lord Level had gathered before I realized it.

I looked over them with my enhanced vision. I could even make out the expressions on those Demons that were like specks of dust from up here. Perhaps they hadn't expected it either, as they all seemed to be dumbfounded.

The situation just kept on changing.

I couldn't move. I hadn't the time to avert my eyes.
I hadn't the time to feel the stir of the wind, or that repulsive and wild miasma act up. I hadn't even the chance to determine whether or not a Skill had been used.

My field of vision was filled by darkness. Within it, I was finally able to regain my self-awareness.

My feet shook, and my soul froze over.
I grasped my situation. I looked over my surroundings in a daze. I made my decision.
It's not like what I saw had changed. It's not that those Demons had disappeared.
Gloria and the others hadn't gone away… but I myself had been transported.

A horridly gloomy corridor constructed of jet black stone. As if placed to measure its depth, the candlesticks stationed at regular intervals. This heavy and cold air.
The dim light put out by the candles contrarily made the places that remained unlit- the nooks of the corridor, and the corners of the ceiling- give off a deeper sense of darkness.

What I had definitely sensed before, the presences of Gloria and the other Demons were no longer there. In their place… I felt a somewhat nostalgic aura.

As if pierced by an icy sword, the inside of my brain gave a cold pain.
In a past beyond memory, it was a presence I'd felt twice before.

My hand creaked.
Without my notice of it, I had begun clenching my sword with all my might. I was putting in enough power for my knuckles to turn white.

Ah, there's no way I could forget it. I didn't even have to try to remember.
No matter how long ago it may have been, even if it was in my time of humanity, my era as a Hero that I had almost completely lost my recollection of to the flow of time, 'That' was something I could never forget.

It was a bitter memory.
What I fought as a Hero, my final enemy.

At that moment, I forgot about Gloria and the other Demons, and even the prophecy, as I thought back to a time passed.

If I had been a true Hero, then the bards' songs would have ended with a triumph, or perhaps a noble sacrifice, yet this tale only ever found its close in one-sided defeat.

* * * * *

The Hero and the Demon Lord.

That pairing that I'm sure every human in the world thought of as equal was, in truth, not equivalent at all. I knew that more than anyone.

As a hero, my sworn enemy was the Demon Lord, but that was the one who had climbed to the surface. The one of the Demon World wasn't something to be dealt with by human hands.

The Under Ground.

It was a sort of taboo. In order to avoid mayhem, there were barely any who even knew of its existence, the world's greatest haunt of evil.
A hell that only existed in bed-time stories. A hell bad kids were sent to for disobeying their mothers.
It was an abyss of a world, where the highest class of Evil Spirits, Demons stood at the summit.

Those fields with miasma swirling about incomparable to what one would find on the surface gave the Demons that already boasted strong powers unsurmountable enhancements. The powers of whatever ones you could find on the surface were something like scraps. When compared to Demons of the Demon world, they wouldn't even reach their feet.

That fact was one that I, as a hero having devoted my life to forging an enormous power, and having racked up my achievements of dispelling any and all evil I could find, learned after finally being permitted to set foot into that world.

Heroes were hope. Against ones who sided with the powers of darkness, defeat was not permitted.
Among the world's few Heroes, the reason that information was passed to me was likely because I was the Hero who threw myself into and triumphed over hopeless situations at a rate incomparable to the others, but still, in the end, I was nothing.

Just as the words implies. Nothing.

I closed my eyes.
What I grasped in my perception was a Mana gloomier, and quieter than all.
As if to show it off, that power pulsed.

I'm being watched. This Demon Lord should already know of my presence. Even so, he doesn't move. It was as if he were telling me to come over to him.
There was no malicious intent, and that power held no impurities, but in size it was larger than anything.
Perhaps… it was even greater than the piercing Mana Gloria displayed at the end.
It wasn't sharp at all. That power merely hung heavily over me. I finally noticed. The identity of what had been stirring my blood and soul when I confronted the Fallen Angel. The presence I didn't notice because of all the Demon Lords mixed in.
I felt a meaningless pressure. Within that, I went forward, step by step.
My memories pumped up, one after another. The power I felt when I fought him as a Hero. It had far exceeded that now.

But my heart was frighteningly calm.

I had conviction that he hadn't been killed off yet. But at the same time, I doubt I would find it strange if he was.
The Demon Lord followed the law of the jungle. Unlike the Angels, that generally never waged wars among themselves, the faces of powerful Demons changed too often. No matter the case, the probability of a Demon that offered absolutely no resistance living such a long life can't be too high.

The passages branched off like a labyrinth. Black walls. The systematic markings carved into them. Perhaps I'm in a Demon Lord's castle.

Within myself, I continued to hone my power, as I disinterestedly walked forward.
They're not here. The overflowing amount of subordinate Demons one would usually find in a Lord's Castle were nowhere to be found.

But even that felt natural to me.
I refined my power.

It was perhaps the only regret I still held for my past life.
For one who cut down all manners of Evil Spirits, all manners of Humans, all manner of sinners, the girl who continued to save the world for her own sake alone, the only lingering attachment to this world.
The reason why, even when I didn't actually like to fight, I chose to continue down this path, even after death.

There wasn't a single one before me to hinder my advance.
What I arrived at was the deepest chamber. A giant set of doors.
The power I felt by putting myself against one of them made me close my eyes. I took some short breaths.

I see… it's on another level.
I finally began to grasp why Heaven dispatched me here.

This must be fate… no, destiny.
I am a hero, and he is a Demon Lord. I'll risk every bit of life I have left in me as a Hero, to take back the defeat I suffered long ago.

In a split second, I had finished mustering up all my resolve, and opened up those doors. Just as I did once, long ago.

Part 4: Until We Meet Again

The Demon Lord was there.
Atop the boorish pitch-black throne. The chamber without a sound.
His hair a deeper shade than black, and those slovenly eyes. A jet-black coat draped over his entire bocy. With shadows stuck to his face, and an irritating look to his eyes, a delicate-looking man.
Compared to any other Demon Lord I had chanced upon before, his appearance was lacking in majesty, and on that, my memories of the past played back. Nothing had changed in his figure since the last we locked blades.

There wasn't another Demon to be found. Even when he was supposed to be a Lord, he had no one to follow him.
There was only one point that differed from my last memory of him. Simply the fact that the man was not asleep.

It seems he truly was waiting for me.
Without saying a word, without any preparations for attack, only his eyes followed me, and those pupils of his were stagnated with an unfamiliar darkness. They didn't even take in the glint of the Holy Sword gripped in my right hand, and all they met with were my own eyes.

… I'm scared.

I took a step forward.
The gap between this pressure pushing down on my entire body, and that dignity that equated close to nothing.
The fact that I felt no fear from looking at him was all the more scary. If it was my first meeting, then I would likely have been caught off guard.
As if I were walking through a bog, my feet were heavy.

The moment I thought to let out my voice, the Demon Lord opened his mouth.

Befitting his appearance, it was a depressing and dark voice. A voice I was hearing for the first time.
What was he to say to me? I tensed up my shoulders, and waited, but his words made me forget my very situation.

"Back hip circle."

"… Eh?"

Back hip… circle?
What is he talking about…? I sought out meaning from his expression, but the Demon Lord's face didn't change at all.
The man before me continued to look in my direction, with eyes that didn't seem to be focused on me, as he talked on.

"In the past, I couldn't do a back hip circle. Do you know of it? Back hip circle? You

use a metal horizontal bar, and you do this sort of spinning motion around it."

"W-what are… you even…"

"I think it was around elementary school… they tried to make us do it in gym class, but I just couldn't do it. I never even thought of trying to be able to do it. Because I never thought myself capable, I didn't even put in the effort. In the end, up to the very last moment, I couldn't do it. In the first place, I was never the best at physical activity."

I couldn't understand any of the words he was letting out at length.
No, besides a small portion of it, I could comprehend the vocabulary. However, I cannot understand the reason of such a talk unfolding here.
I can't read his intent.

Leaving me to the wayside, the Demon Lord went one.
He was full of openings, but I didn't even have the will to attack him.
The only thing I could understand was that this meaningless banter wasn't the sort of thing to occur before the world's decisive battle.

"And so, naturally, even when I went graduated to middle school and graduated to high school, and even after I entered college, I could never do it. Well, I've never seen anyone in college doing a back hip circle on a horizontal bar, but… I guess that doesn't really matter. What I'm trying to say is that, in the end, even when I went out and became a working adult, I never became able to do a back hip circle. Even when most of my past memory's faded away, I wonder why that's the only thing I can remember."

Fuuuh. The Demon Lord let out what was clearly a sigh, before his lips curved.

"… But it seems that right now, I can do pretty much anything."

I had never even imagined this Lord as one to laugh, but what had dimly grazed his face was surely… a smile. It wasn't one of ridicule like Gloria's, and it wasn't anything like an honest smile of joy. I'm sure it was his self derision.
The Demon Lord's words didn't stop. It was as if he was a completely different person from the one I met before.

His words came out disinterestedly, but I could feel an emotion I couldn't understand behind them.
The topic changed quite suddenly.

"Then have you ever heard of the Magic Lamp?"

"Magic… Lamp?"

Listening to his words is a waste of time. I should initiate an attack. But my hands won't move.
These words without meaning, without intent, were binding my movement. It wasn't something like a Skill.
I knew. It wasn't that I didn't want to move. I wanted to listen.
I had the feeling that the reason for both of my defeats lay somewhere in there.

"Yeah. It's in the One Thousand and One Stores… A fairy tale from the Arabian Nights.

A tale of a genie that came out from rubbing a musty oil lamp.”

“I don’t… know it.”

Fairy tale.
It’s a story I’ve never heard of before, and I’m not sure what he’s trying to say. Perhaps there nothing I should say here.
I couldn’t see an atrocious nature in him, and yet my shoulders trembled.

In this case, having him direct killing intent at me would be… much easier.
I had forgotten about it. The cold feeling running up from my navel. Fear.

The Demon Lord raised his voice into a laugh. It was a dry chuckle.
Looking upon the scene, I doubt there’s a single one who’d call this man a Demon Lord.
I finally noticed the reason. He was much to lacking in anything one could see as desire.

“Just by brushing up against a lamp, all sorts of wishes could be granted. That sort of story. Having lost any and all restrictions, a magic tool to grant any prayer. I sometimes thing. Of lucky Aladdin whose hands it happened to fall into… just what sort of thoughts went through his mind.”

I don’t know. I don’t know anything.
With an aloof attitude, he avoided my wary eyes. And the Demon Lord’s face changed.
A sigh, and a sinking voice.

“Hero…”

『Hero』

It was a word I hadn’t heard from another in a long time.
There’s barely anyone left in this world to call me by that name. It had truly been a long time since anyone named me as such, that it took a moment for me to realize he was calling out to me.

Perhaps this man is all that’s left to call me by that name. The final enemy I failed to kill. The final enemy to know me as a Hero.

“Hero… I’m… surely a『Cheat』.”

“Ch… eat?”

He folded over his legs, sent those abyssal eyes at me, and sighed.
I couldn’t tell the motives behind that word. But it had been the one with the single most emotion packed into it.
A voice that sounded as if it was tired of everything. Back when I was a human, when I had lived as a Hero, the voice used by those with things they should have protected. A child who’d lost his parents, a young man who’d lost their lover, a soldier who’d gone up against the forces of evil, and survived their own defeat.

“Even without doing anything, I’ve become able to accomplish anything. Without any of the effort, I’ve become able to do anything. I’m sure there’s no worth left in any of it. That’s why, to me, you’re the only lingering attachment I have to this world.”

I couldn’t possibly understand the words from this Demon Lord.
But it’s not like I didn’t have anything left to think.

Still, more than that, I understood that the die had been cast. That the formalities had been gone and done with.
Demon Lord and Hero. What we had to do had been determined long ago. I was already resolved. I wasn’t negligent.

That was something my opponent was well aware of.

“Now, it sure has been a while, Hero. You, who may be the one to kill me. You, who may be the one to be killed by me. My arch nemesis. The only one I’ve ever recognized as an enemy of my own volition. Have you trained yourself enough? Do you remember our last battle?”

Our last battle. The blows from my Holy Sword that were unable to leave a single scratch on him flashed back in my mind.

The Demon Lord who barely moved.
After tens of hundreds of thousands of years, just what has changed in this man? His face held a gentle spot of delight.

The fact that I was to meet him the first I stepped foot into the Demon World was just a coincidence.
The second time, I sought him out, and demanded a battle.
And surely, this third confrontation is fate.
That’s why, no matter the numbers that Demon Lords exist in, thie man is the one that must be killed by me.

As a Hero.

I put more light, more soul into the Holy Sword.
My past retreat. Where even in his normal state, he boasted immense defensive power to render any blade inept. The Demon Lord who broke my blade.

And I didn’t know his name. The man introduced himself for the first time.

“… Right, my name is Leigie. The Lazy King governing the sin of『Sloth』, and your… enemy. I’ve already taken care of anyone to interfere. Now, Hero, come and…”

The Demon Lord’s fingers mover ever so slightly. My senses were honed to a level higher than ever before.
I immediately jumped to the side to evade. The door behind me was blown off its hinges.

『I’ve already taken care of anyone to interfere.』

As I thought the one who launched an attack on Gloria was this man!

The Lazy King who named himself as Leigie muttered in a slovenly tone without any intonation.
I kicked the ground, and used my wings to accelerate.

Leigie’s gaze intersected with the killing intent in my eyes.

Without letting out any words, the Demon Lord's lips moved to themselves.

『… try to kill me.』

* * * * *

What I was given as a Hero, and honed as an Angel were all directed towards battle.
The shaking of my hands, and the shaking of my body had ceased.
I stepped in. The floor shattered before my feet. The strongest concentration. The strongest condition. There wasn't any space left in my soul for me to feel fear against this Demon Lord. The greatest, and most powerful enemy of all was before me, and the all the experience I had ever gotten over my life was whispering for me to defeat him.

My awareness was suddenly delayed. I could clearly see the bags that had formed under his eyes.

Leigie. Leigie the Depraved.
The name rolled around my tongue.

Without his name, there was never a way to look into him.
Even if I may have been a human, I wielded the foremost power of the Surface World, and his ability to block that without anything to guard himself meant there was no way he wasn't a long lived Demon.
But I think I was just running away. With that power before me, I had broken. I was running from his existence. Because if I was to learn of him again, I would have no choice but to fight him.

But at times, I did wonder whether I would see him again. Even if I didn't as one on the vanguard of heaven, most information about Demons naturally entered my ears. As natural as it may be, I did have knowledge of that name.
Leigie. Leigie the Depraved.
One who pulled their bowstring against the Heavens, one of oldest Demon of them all. Leigie Slaughterdolls.

I already knew his characteristics. The characteristics of an Acedia Demon.
It was an absolute defense. That was all.
That enhancement was separate from his base specs, but there's no way his offensive power or speed is anything too high. At the very least, he should be less than Gloria in that aspect.
The threat of his invisible attacks lay in that he sent them out from a distance impossible to detect. If Leigie and Gloria had directly confronted one another, then she would likely have been able to employ some form of tactic.

What I need is a destructive power great enough to destroy his soul, and that was my… reason for defeat.

Have I trained myself? … There's no need to ask. At the start, it was just something that had been handed to me, but I surely trained that power. As a Valkyrie, so as not to face defeat a second time. In the years since I was reborn, there's no way I was just playing around.

Regret, regret, regret.

There was no way I could fill it in with my human body… the sheer difference between us.

The magician's words of pity repeated within my head.

I don't need to think of defense. The power I have now, what I never had before. The Fortis Authority. My heart will never break.

"The truth is… I did feel a little sorry for it."

The moment my sword was about to reach him, before my eyes, Leigie, who should have been but a step away, grew farther.

My sense of distance was upturned. My suppositions, and the disparity of truth. I used the momentum that was causing me to topple over, and took another step. With all my power, I gripped the sword in both hands, and aimed for his heart.

… And at that moment, he became farther again.

It's not my imagination. It's not an illusion.

… Farther? No, that's wrong. Leigie was still sitting on the throne.

The one moving away was… me.

The throne was just a few meters in front of me. I put more power into my feet, and dove in. the moment before the blade reached him, my field of vision shifted.

It wasn't my eyes playing tricks on me. It wasn't that my body was being manipulated.

"I'm sorry for not taking you on earnestly last time. Well, I was sleepy, so there really was no helping it, but… if I had been a little more serious back then, perhaps I wouldn't have to go through these regrets. The thought alone kept me up at ni… oh, wait, well, um…"

While talking on, Leigie's arm gave a small movement.

An impact sent my entire body flying.

Oh shi…

By the time I noticed it, it was too late. My body crashed into the wall, and was pressed against it. By an invisible feeling of pressure.

It was a force that made my body feel it would be ripped apart. My creaking body and the wall both let out their screams.

Leigie presented out the palm of his hand. He started turning his hand in a circle. Accompanying that motion that looked like a joke, the points of pressure twisted.

While looking upon that scene carelessly, Leigie politely, as if he was trying to buy time for something, began to explain.

What foolishness is this… no, it would be strange for me to think that he only had a single power.

I'm fine, the damage is within expectations. My bones aren't broken, and I haven't suffered anything fatal.
And more than that, I was impressed. On the fact that Leigie initiated an attack on his own.

"『Aport』"

Turning my blade on a being without resistance, yet having it fall flat.
It was a situation as if my everything had all been meaningless, and that had been the greatest fear I held.
The Demon Lord is to attack me, and I'm to counteract. In that case, I can still be a Hero.

Even if that Lord had yet to even rise from his throne.

"『Teleportation』 and 『Psychokinesis』. Of course, here, they have different names, but… it seems that all the powers I ever wished for have come into my hands."

While he went on about his own Skills, his face held no scorn, or anger, or sorrow.
The Demon Lord stood. Even when there was no need to stand, he rose. The past two times, he had laid sprawled out the entire battle, and yet he stood.

"Hero, I will pay respect to you as a Demon Lord, by killing you. You will kill me, and I will kill you. Even if it felt like a pain, I'm sure that's what I should have done."

Even when all he did was stand, even when it's not like his power rose at all, a premonition of my entire body being swallowed up made my arms tremble.
I frantically moved my crushed body, and touched whatever was pressing down on me with the Holy Sword.
An invisible something was ripped through, and vanished. My body was released. I landed over the carpet. I had a slight hope, but it doesn't look like Leigie took any damage.

I let out a short breath. My head hurt so much it felt it would split. I didn't have enough oxygen. I didn't have enough Mana.
I'm sure my heart felt fear. Before the existence who defeated me without me having any means to resist. It was a form of trauma.

But I'll ignore that. I had confidence. I had always fought on. A majority of my enemies had been above me.
The reason I won against them was simply… because I never gave up.

First, I'll have to land an attack. A blow with all my might.
My target is the Demon's heart… his soul core. As long as Leigie is taking up human form, its location should be in his left chest… where a heart was supposed to bear.
I can't release energy at him. I'll have to slash at him directly…

I put my breathing in order. My sword was already fully loaded with power.
Teleport, Aport. It will be next to impossible to approach him, but if I fail the first time, then perhaps I can close in the second.

I wanted an opening. I chanted magic.
Leigie's movements were slow. That psychokinesis thing was linked to the Demon Lord's movements. I saw that clearly.

I cut away the palm shot at me. It's difficult to dodge, but as I thought, it's fragile. As long as I inflict an attack on it, it'll disappear.

White light flickered on and off as it gathered in my left hand.

With depressing eyes, Leigie looked at me.

"Hah… hah…"

"… Ah. You're really looking the part there."

"『Crescent Thunder』!!"

Leigie's slovenly posture was swallowed up by the white thunder I released.

It was a lightning attribute offensive magic possessed by Heroes.
The carpet caught fire, and the throne was taken in by it. Imbued with a holy element, that lightning was originally supposed to deal heavy damage to dark forces. But General Class was one thing, and I didn't think that it would have any effect on this Lord.

The moment I fired it, I let my body dance through the sky. I took flight. The ceiling was high, and I was able to soar about.
I took a great spin, and swooped down to try and behead him from behind. At that moment, the scene before me changed.
Leigie, who was supposed to be before my eyes, disappeared, and the blade's edge cut through the air.
I had predicted it before hand, so I didn't stiffen up.
I carefully examined the power of my foe. Aport. There's no forewarning of it. I can't go against it. From before Leigie's eyes, I had been transported to the end of the room. A wall close in up to my nose.
I was able to tell the Demon Lord's positioning in an instant. When I'm this close, then I can tell every one of his actions, even without looking at him. I hit down the invisible hand lowered on me with my sword, and ripped through it.

I kicked the wall, and moved my wings again, as I accelerated towards him. Ours eyes met. Those eyes of his were certainly keeping up with my movements.
I put power into the sword, and simultaneously sent out an incantation-less『Cresent Thunder』. Leigie's befuddled expression disappeared into the light.
I continued to raise my speed even further, and dived straight into the light. The moment I entered it, I heard a voice from within.

"AS I thought, I'm not suited to killing… hah… it was something I already knew, but…"

Leigie's presence disappeared. No, it moved.
From in front of my eyes, to behind. This time, it wasn't that I had moved, but Leigie.
A few meters to my rear.

Mater transportation. It truly is a fearsome power. But sometimes, such fearsome power comes with restrictions.
Is it effective time? Distance? Or perhaps limited uses?

I won't give him the time. Can he use it consecutively? Various thoughts flew through

my head.
I began moving a speed that felt it would make my heart burst. It doesn't really matter if I die. My body creaked as it displayed abilities beyond my limits.
My consciousness accelerated. I turned around, and shot lightning again. Speed and power. I want an opening. Just a small gap, a space of a single breath is enough. Without him avoiding, a small space without him using a Skill.

I shortened the few meters in an instant. I instinctively cut off the invisible power lowered on my right arm.
I kicked the ground. My step was too powerful, and my right ley let out an ominous sound. It's likely broken. I don't feel any pain. I don't really care.

Having had Mana poured into it past its limit, the blade of the Holy Sword expanded. A materialization of pure energy, a sword of light.
Just one step. One more step, and I'll reach him. Leigie turned his eyes from my blade, and directed his gaze on my hand.

At that moment, my field of vision fell.
As If I were falling, I approached the ground. My mind went blank for an instant.
I tried to move my arms, but they wouldn't move. What I should have had held up before me, the sword that should have been in my grasp, was falling alongside me.

An impact. My chin hit against the carpet. My arms won't move. My legs won't move. As if I were watching a long dream, my body lacked a sense of reality.
And it was there, that I finally noticed my arms weren't connected to my body.
A heat as if to burn through my body broke out through my torso. It was, as if to corrode away my body, moving up.

I didn't feel any pain. The arms that casually rolled on the ground before me. Still clutched around the Holy sword, their cross section, as if finally remembering their original form, began to spurt out blood.
My conscious became distant at once. I somehow withstood that with will power, and glared at my arms.

It was a slash. My disembodied arms. It was something that I had seen time and again on the battlefield, the traces left behind by a blade.

… That can't be… when did he…

Leigie wasn't holding a sword. When I had just been a step away from reaching him, the Demon Lords hands were surely empty.
This is bad. It isn't such a bad thing to die, but it's bad for an incomprehensible attack to assail me now.
I don't have any more time. Having lost its weilder, the Holy Sword's power would dwindle the more time passed.

Right before my consciousness was to go out, Leigie looked down over me, and muttered.

"… Do you know of dolls? Hah…"

… Human… form…
My flickering sight. On those words, I finally realized that a power besides that of Leigie had been close.

Human… form. Leigie Slaughterdolls. The last name was one's way of life, and his way was Slaughterdolls.

I… see…

"It was a nice match, Hero. My regrets have, more or less… died down, perhaps."

"Don't… screw with… me."

Regrets have… died down?
Nice match?

Not yet. I've yet to lose.
I had stepped in more than enough. The distance to Leigie was already less than a single Meter.
There was still power left in the Holy Sword.

"Don't… look down on a『Hero』!!"

The form of the Demon Lord turning his back to me right above. A clear gap.
I wrung out my remaining power, and yelled.
A new『Cause of Death: Blood Loss』message came up, and I revived. Jumping up, I moved forward.

In concert with my will, the sword sparkled.
The strongest blow. With all my Mana, with all my existence backing it, that blow closed in on the Demon Lord's back.
At around the same time, the heat ran up my chest again, but it's too late.
The tip of the sword pierced into his left chest from behind.

"… So you were… still alive…?"

"Wha…"

This can't be…

The sword I had wrung out all my power into. The strike that should have pierced through his flesh, and then his Soul Core, had come to a stop.
My hand felt numb. I felt a hart response all over my arm.
The heat and pain encroaching on me, bit by bit. I ignored whatever response was sent by my sense of pain, and rotated the holy sword.

It's no good… he's too hard. I got through his flest, but I couldn't inflict anything on his core.

I have… no chance of winning.
Just like before. No matter how much courage I wring out of myself, no matter how much Mana I have, no matter how many Skills I learn, no matter how far I withdraw, if I can't even damage him, my victory is… impossible.

My knees buckled, and the ground closed in on me. Power was leaving my body. What was pierced was my own left breast… the aim was my soul core. It's a fatal wound.

It's… alright. I'm not scared. I won't lose. I'll beat him. I have to beat him. If I don't stand here… then who will?

I'm sure that my heart… has yet to break.
If Leigie's regrets were to be me, then the final regrets left in me… the reason I, reluctantly enough, fought on half by habit, yet still chost to stand on the battlefield after death… That reason must be… none other than this Demon Lord.

A scene like a revolving lantern passed through my head.
Without being able to move a single eyelid, I died.

* * * * *

If I wasn't able to find any particular reason, then I'm sure that was the reason that I had no choice but to live in solitude.

My grey rat-colored hair was constantly bathed in a highly concentrated Mana of light, and at some point, it had changed to a vivid silver color.
It wasn't just an ordinary silver, but a silver close to blue.

No matter how many times I looked at it, the silver blue hair reflected at me never truly felt like my own.
Even though, by now, I should have been accompanied by that silver a far longer time than my association with that gray.

The form reflected in the water's surface, smoothed over lie a mirror.

All that was there was a single Hero.
An aloof hero. Having obtained the epithet of『Silver Blue』by others before she noticed it, a lone Hero.

Serge of the Silver Blue. Serge Serenade.
Not taking about a single comrade, the one who continued to fight against the enemies of humanity. The sword of hope.

"Haha… ha…"

My laughing voice was shaking.

The Hero Class was powerful. It was to force a single human to live the life of a single sword.
It improved the human body to fight against those of evil. It enhanced physical strength, inflated one's Mana, and granted powerful Skills. Enough that a village girl who had yet to even come of age, could fell monsters by her hand.
The only thing that one couldn't obtain with the Class itself, was the all important『Courage』. That alone was something one had to make do with their own efforts.

Strong. Its power was certainly strong. But even so, I was scared.

My breath was rough. My hands shook, and my heart gave a heavy beat.

I looked at the palm of my hand. Having overcome hundreds of thousands of dark forces, yet come out without a single wound, those white and elegant fingers, as if to reflect the inside of my heart, were shaking.

I clenched my fist.
It was a fear I'd tasted countless times, and nothing to me at this point.
To those cut down by me, they must have felt a fear much greater than this.

As if to encourage me on, the Holy Sword gripped in my right hand gave a small pulse.
I wonder when it was that I noticed whispering to myself would more or less calm me down. Perhaps it was in that distant time when I first started fighting against abnormal monsters. If that wasn't the case, then surely I would have… broken long ago.

"I'm not scared. I'm not scared. I'm not scared. I'm not scared. I won't lose. I won't lost. I won't lose. I won't lose. There's no way I can… lose."

Even if I never had anything precious.
Even if I never had any comrades to fight alongside me.

I just looked ahead.
There was no one to listen to me. No, there never should have been.
As if to read off a line to myself alone, I whispered.

"I mean, I'm… a Hero."

I strongly gripped the sword.
The smell of blood and iron and death. The presence of war, and the abnormal cries.
A battlefield where, if a normal man were to happen upon it, he would all but fall to madness.

Even if I was bad at talking with people, I could cut down monsters.
No matter how helpless I may be, as long as I don't let it reach my face, no one will notice.
That's why, no matter how far I went, I accomplished my role as a Hero.

I packed power below my navel, concentrated my attention on my heart, and excited the Mana over my entire body. Concentration great enough for it to take on tangible form, silvery blue Mana blew over as a wind, and drew spirals as it circled up around me.
The wails of the magic beasts ceased. The spirits invisible to my eyes trembled, the world stopped.

Within that noisy world, I was alone.

"See, aren't I… strong?"

Having I gained the Hero Class, and rushed across a countless number of battlefields, there was something I came to understand.

Heroes were weapons. Even if there was no technique in their arms, and no good in their hearts, they were envoys of light that could cut down anything with their pure volume of Mana. Those needlessly powerful Skills, and the Holy Sword that inflicted

enormous damage on the vassals of darkness were merely a byproduct of that.

I remember the words once imparted on me by the king of a country I stopped by long ago.

… Hero Serge, never forget that the lives of tens of thousands of civilians rest on your back. Every time you hesitate, human lives will perish. Every time you retreat, human lives will perish. If you're to ever face defeat, then… a countless number of lives that could have been saved will be lost forever.

『… Yes…』

Back then, I had thought it a horribly selfish thing to impart such a burden on a simple little girl But it's also a truth that I found solace in it.

A light like an aurora emitted from my sword.
That beautiful spectrum that had entranced me the first time I emitted it, after tens and hundreds of uses, was only something I had grown accustomed to.

The grotesque eyes gathered on me.
All sorts of seeds to become the enemies of humanity. Against the forms of various monsters, I smiled with my face alone, and let a light that was nothing but bright flow out from my Holy Sword.

"…"

The first time, I let out an unsightly cry. Because if I didn't, my mind would have been paralyzed by fear.
But now, I don't even have to raise a single word.

I inhaled in a shallow breath of air. I exhaled. With just that, I could divert my fear. I overwrote it with fighting spirit.
The point I became a Hero was the point I cast away my tears.

From a hill overlooking a vast land, I ran as if intending to tumble. No matter how steep the slope, I was never tripped up.
If it was just for a short time… I could even soar through the sky. I trampled over all the obstacles. Enhanced by my power as a Hero, my physical abilities didn't fall short of a magic beast's.

Every time I swung the Holy Sword, the monsters would be bisected in a flash, and the lightning would strike through them. My visual and auditory senses and all else were taken in by blood. The feel of cutting into meat, repelling the survivors.
Normal beings of the monster race held dreadful figures, but to me, they were nothing more than scraps of paper. In just one swing of the sword, the monster that would have taken hundreds of human lives was killed.

My objective was always… the ones clad in the greatest miasma. The enemies of humanity.

On the battlefield, in the center of a wasteland, I found them. Among piles of corpses.
The greatest for of Evil Spirit to appear on the Surface World. With numbers countable on a single hand, they could take down an entire country. And before those strongest Evil Spirits, I alone brandished my sword.

My own foolishness no longer produced anything from me but a quivering laugh.
Friends? Comrades? Something like that… there's no way I could have anything like that.

A Hero's power was something extraordinary.
Even among those that held the Hero class, the one heralded as the strongest was me… there's no way there was anyone in humanity who could keep up.

* * * * *

My consciousness returned.

"… So you can still stand… that's strange… I'm sure you should be dead by now…"

By the time I realized it, I had already stood up again.
What raced through my head were the battlefields I once ran across. The lantern turn itself for but an instant.
I knew. What's left in me is… not courage, but just my dignity as a Hero.

"I'm… not… scared."

The Holy Sword was the same as before. As if to cheer me up, it let out a glimmer.
I followed my experience, and at the presence I sensed behind, I turned my body, and let the Holy Sword come down.
The weight I felt on my arms. The sharp sound of metal colliding.

What had appeared at some point in time, something with its entire body shrouded in black armor, locked blades with me. If it was just in physical strength, the other side had the advantage. It was a fearsome force, and a fearsome speed, but in technique, I'm… the greater.
Two strikes, three strikes, our blades met one another, but on the third time, what it should have blocked with its sword, it took with its body. Caring not for the flesh it bisected, the Holy Sword cut through that trunk of a body from left to right.

There was a tough resistance, but I was certain of my target's destruction.
The body close to two meters in size vanished, and on top of the bloodstained carpet, what took its place was a black chess piece divided in two.

The Fortis Authority could return light to my eyes. But the rolling piece wasn't to become my threat again.

I overcame my shaking body with fighting spirit, and confronted the Demon Lord again.
I pretended not to notice the hopeless chances of victory swirling about my head.

"… What is… with that…"

"… I won't… lose…"

The Demon Lord quietly sat back on the throne. While furrowing his brow, there was no sign of him initiating another attack.

If I can't pierce through his core, I'll have to aim for his neck. If not the neck, then an arm or a leg. Anyways, I'll have to inflict just a little damage…

I gripped the Holy Sword in both hands. I can't hear anything. I can't see anything. I can't understand anything. I stepped in, and swung to take his neck. The muscles of my arms cramped up, and let off creaking sounds. I paid no mind to my own damage.

Leigie wasn't even looking at me. He let out a sigh, and opened his right hand.
The space before my eyes turned pitch black. But the kinetic energy I had given my body did not die down. My sword was definitely coming towards Leigie's head, and…

There was so much resistance, it felt like my heart was painted out.

Wh… y… his skin is…

"…"

I couldn't let out my voice. I frantically tried to scream.
I was able to pierce him before. I was definitely able to pierce all the way to his soul core, and yet now my blade… won't enter his flesh!

What!? How!? Why!?

The character string appeared again. I didn't even give the『Cause of Death: Destruction of Soul Core』a second glance.
I can't move at all. Only my field of vision turned left and right. Within my stagnant time, I thought.

Is it that I can't rend his bones? No. I didn't make it to the bone. It stopped on his first layer of skin.
If it was metal armor, I would have sliced through with ease, and I could just as easily cut through the barrier of any high class magic barrier, yet a hard sensation remained in the Holy Blade.
It was, strangely enough, the… same as the last thing that had been left in my hands in my final battle as a hero.

Until just now, until this moment… it definitely got through!!

My heart shuddered like never before.
Having obtained『Fortis』, there was a great unrest I felt when I experienced death for the first time. This was an impact surpassing that.

『Brave Heart』shook. I'm sure it was a Skill that was supposed to be peerless. The path that I never lost sight of, despite my fear and my shivers, was starting to feel unsteady.

Before the selections laid out before me, my will to stand whispered quietly to me.
The simple『YES』and『NO』gained greater meaning that ever before, as they pressed down on my choice.

『Do you still have the will to fight on?』

『Before a great darkness, before an existence much greater than your own, do you have the reason to stand and face him?』

『Do you have the courage?』

The magician's old words echoed with them.

『Serge, you have the right to choose. To live as a hero to light up the dark, or… to waste your entire life as a normal civilian…』

I would think back to that question from time to time.
If perhaps I had chosen the path of a normal person, then would it truly have been so useless?
Perhaps it was my life as a hero, and my afterlife as a Valkyrie, descended to repeat endless battles day after day after day that was the wasted one?

The answer had yet to come. That's why, just once more…

By the phenomenon brought about by my Fortis Skill, my extracted Soul Core was brought back to life. Light blessed my eyes once more, and from the depths of my body gushed up the heat of life. It was an uplifting feeling as if to blow away my fears.I'm sure that for all this time, Fortis Angels have fought on with nothing but that courage as their weapon.

My hazy vision came into focus. At some point in time, Leigie's gaze from his seat on the throne had quietly directed itself down on me.

"Ye s… I'll fight…"

"Hero, could it be… you can't die? Even if your heart is destroyed, you'll revive?"

As I thought, unlike Gloria, this Demon Lord knowns not of my authority.

In Leigie's right hand, that should have been empty, a transparent crystal appeared. That item that was basked in the glimmer of a finally cut diamond, was promptly crushed in his palm.

Light was extracted from my eyes again. Of course, I had never seen it in my eyes before, but I understood by instinct. That was… my heard.

『Aport』

It couldn't be… no, there's nothing… else I can think of. Matter transportation from within my body.
『Cause of Death: Destruction of Soul Core』. The words danced before my eyes.

A ridiculous power. A peerless… ability. Be it Angel or Demon, no matter how strong they may be, there wasn't a single one who could live without their heart.

… Besides me.

I no longer have any hesitation. My spirit blazed up.
In order to clear away all the darkness. In order for my existence to hold meaning.

That's why I became a Hero!

Death distanced itself. The feeling of nihility assailing my body was overwritten with the reality of life.
I clenched my teeth, and stood up again. Again and again. I'll stand as many times it takes. You'll see.

"I won't… lose…"

"Hero… I… see… Hero."

The blade I put my might behind, my wishes behind, was brought to a halt by Leigie standing still.
He stopped the Holy Sword that, if he were a Demon, if he was one in cahoots with darkness, it should have burned through his entirety. It wasn't his neck. The blade came into contact with his unhealthy-looking face, and stooped as if I was living a nightmare.
My hopes were smashed. Not a single drop of Leigie's blood flowed. He took it head-on, and without even making preparations to defend, he took on the power of a Hero, and the light to destroy all darkness without a scratch.

I let out a piercing yell, and thrust again. Leigie didn't dodge.
But what I aimed at his left chest was stopped without even piercing the flesh.
It's no good… he's hard… he's too hard. The skin I was able to get through once, I couldn't pierce again.

"Hey, please tell me one thing, Serge."

Should I retreat? Should I pull back once, and face him again? Can I even face him? Is there… an existence that can triumph over this Lord?
There is. There has to be… In the heavens, there were plenty of those wielding powers greater than mine. If it's them, then…

… Right, the Demon World… if I pull him out of the Demon World, perhaps I can win. But am I… capable of such a feat?

"Hey, Serge Serenade."

I thrust the blade, and receiving an additional attack, Leigie didn't direct the slightest hostility at me.
I struck my lightning into him. The world was filled with light, and the intense discharge caused an echoing sound, but the voice reverberating from within it didn't stop.

"Can you… not die? Is your valor, your courage… a result of your lack of death?"

"…"

The lightning disappeared.

The abyss was peering into me.
The abyss was questioning me.
A black to suck in all sorts of light. Those darkness colored irises were examining me.

"Courage born of an inability to die. Could that truly… be called the work of a『Hero』?"

I'm sure it was an honest query. There was no good or bad intent behind it.
But I cannot listen to him. I can't deal with him head-on.

I can't be brought in by the darkness. Rather than my heart shattering, I was much more afraid of my will falling apart.
The question lasted a few seconds. There was no answer. But I didn't remove my eyes from him.

The Demon Lord moved. Separating from the throne, one step forward. The slash I released in desperation, Leigie received with the palm of his hand.
The Holy sword slid through and cut off half his hand frighteningly easily.

"… Ah, I see. So you were a『Cheat』, same as me…"

I never thought an attack would get through.
For an instant, my thoughts froze. Like a separate lifeform, his fingers flew off, and rolled along the carpet.

Without paying any attention to them, Leigie's face continued to approach me. The bags stuck under his eyes. The mediocre face of a man one couldn't see as anyone strong.
His breath hit an area around my ear.

"It's fine. You've no need to despair… if it's me, I can issue an end to your life without death."

Differing from before, a cold Mana started welling up.
I instinctively tried to retreat back, only to notice my legs would no longer move.
Leigie's face had approached to a few centimeters before me. In his eyes, reflected the scene of my features freezing over.
The chill gradually rising up from my feet. I tried wringing out my power, but my lower body wouldn't budge in the slightest.

"… Sleep for the rest of your days. I won't forget you."

The tips of my fingers were iced over. The area below my navel lost its power, and my face was suspended.
I didn't feel any pain. Only my heat was being robbed away. A cold something was passing over my spine. It wasn't just a hallucination.

Leigie raised a quiet voice like one of a parent to their child.

"I think I'll… wait for the next Hero, whom I'm not even sure exists."

"Ah… ah…"

The nature of Leigie's power had changed. From one the was simply heavy, to one heavy and cold.
His finger was fixed on my chin. I didn't look down. I can't see what's becoming of my body. But I know.
My time is stoping. My Soul Core is freezing.
Everythign I have in me is losing its heat. My body, my will.

Is this… death?
The ice came up to my chest. Slowly, and as if to harass me, oh so quiet. But it was

certain.
Contrary to my desire, my lips began to move.

“Am I… going to… die?”

“No, you’re not going to die. You’re going to end. Thank you for staying as my enemy. You can… rest now.”

A one-sided verdict. His calm words, and his dark eyes.
My chest was frozen over, and it continued up my collar to cover my throat.

Yeah, I already knew. I’m sure… this is… the end.
The Holy Sword lost its light. My arm had frozen through long ago, and it wouldn’t move in the slightest. Even if that blade had still been clad in light, I no longer had the hands to move it.
From the core of my body, I was frozen. No, this must be just as the Demon Lord said… suspension.
Even with my breast frozen over, the selection didn’t appear to me.
It was a phenomenon I had never seen before. No, if you count the time I felt it when I lost my human body, this was my second… end.

“…”

My voice would no longer come out.
Unrest. My emotions were rocked by an incomprehensible wave.
Regrets? Hesitations? Anger? Grief? Or perhaps… Relief?
I don’t know anymore. I don’t know anything.

What I heard at the end was, differing completely from the rewards of foreign kings, and the ovations of the people I saved, and the oracles given to me by the Angels, uncalculated, and honest commendation.

“Until we meet again, my old friend.”

Final Chapter: Luxuria's Affection

Just Take it as it Comes

… Thus, the Lord was there. Today as well.

The transcendent being. An ancient and great Demon. The master of Depravity and Sloth. The eternal ruler. Slaughter Dolls.
Evil God. Leigie Slaughterdolls. The… master I am to serve.

The Lazy King.
His existence itself evaded all the glimmering lights of creation. A King of darkness.
From the endlessly distant past, a Demon who reigned over this world.

"Good work… my liege."

"… Yeah."

Having woken up for the first time in a long while, Leigie-sama's behavior hadn't changed in the slightest.
The jet black throne. It was said to have existed long before the Castle of Shadows was completed, It was the only seat that the Lazy King alone was permitted to sit in. I sent it a hollow glance.

What was at the end of my eyes was a single girl.
Vibrant silver hair and eyes. Her somewhat innocent eyes gave off a strong, and dangerous sort of charm, and the pure white wings growing from her back gave off a strong light, even in the darkness, as if to display her will.
But she wasn't to move again. From her feet to the roots of her hair, she was covered with a highly transparent wall of ice, and now, she looked nothing more than a work of art.

Valkyrie. A mere shadow of what once was Serge Serenade of the Silver Blue.
That beautiful form enough to make my heart skip a beat, regardless of the fact I was a Demon, or that I was of the same gender, caused my feelings to move a little.

"… How was it?"

The words I unintentionally let out had exceeded my authority.
With my only role being to offer assistance to Leigie-sama, I did not have the right to ask of his opinion. Even if… Leigie-sama himself held no strong emotion towards that fact.
It was of the server and the served, the servant and the lord. A clear line.

Without even taking a fleeting glance at me, Leigie-sama spoke, as if giving a soliloquy alone.

"… Alright, I guess… when it's all over, this is all to remain… That's how most things go in the world, anyways…"

It's not… alright.

The figure of him letting out a deep sigh truly gave off the impression that he felt nothing at all.

But I had a slight idea of it.

One governing Sloth, Leigie-sama personally waited on the throne, and he let out his impression in more than three words.

Of course, no matter how long I had been in service to him, my Lord's Will wasn't something someone of my lowly status should have been judging, but… I'm sure that an emotion other than Sloth had moved him.
For some reason, it pained me.

Even if understanding that fact was what truly was beyond my authority.

"It seems I've… become too strong… I'm not sure if she came too early or too late… No, it's all just useless supposition."

The black briefcase propped up against the throne transported itself to his hand.
It was a power to draw in whatever one wanted.
Within my long years of service, that power that even I had never seen before was one that Leigie-sama had obtained quite recently. A power transcending Demon Lord Level.

Perhaps the clasps hadn't been fastened properly, as the contents were exposed.
Inside, numerous chess pieces had been stuffed. It was one of Leigie-sama's few personal belongings.
Chess pieces. It's not definite what era they were manufacuter in, but the pieces were pitch black.

At the start, there were likely six types, sixteen pieces in total, but now, there were numerous empty spaces dotted around it.
the Pawn that had been split cleanly in half teleported, and filled in one of those holes. Though a piece that had once died shouldn't be able to be used again.

They were weapons. Boasting the epithet Slaughter Dolls, Leigie-sama's important, and unique weapons.
They had likely been by his side for far longer than I had ever served him…

Originally, I should have been the one to pick it up for him. I knew that. I knew, but I couldn't get any closer.
Leigie-sama's expression was just too sad, too depressed… even though it wasn't through fear, my body wouldn't move.
His power had been too far above, and he couldn't stand alongside the one he wanted most.
That body of his was unbelievably greater than that of all the Demon Lords who underestimated, and despised him.

No matter how many years passed, how many tens of hundred of thousands of tens of thousands of years were to pass, he was too far for them to even see his feet.

Leigie-sama slowly moved his right hand back and forth.

"… My liege, what may be the matter?"

"… You've been being quite… annoying for a while…"

"!? Annoying… is it?"

The words suddenly directed at me made it feel as if my heart was to stop, but I soon realized that wasn't the case.
Leigie-sama's eyes were watching some far off place that wasn't here.
Somewhere much to distant for my eyes to see. I'm here to look after my lord. For that sake, I underwent training, and a majority of my life had been devoted to that. But how deplorable it was there there were still things I was incapable of.
Even if I knew that was just my ego speaking…

"Ah… hah… even if I have the means, what a pain it is… if I ignored them, I doubt it would become a problem, but no matter what, they catch my attention."

"… Is there anything that I can do?"

"Ah… no, you may leave. Iyo."

After letting out a deep sigh, Leigie-sama raised his face, and pointed to the ice sculpture with sluggish movements.

"Please bring that over to my room."

"Your room… is it?"

"Yeah."

"Understood."

Without asking any more, I gave a deep bow. I folded my hips, and put both hands to my apron.

The opponent he went as far as to sit on the throne for. He probably has much to think of.
He drove both me and Medea out, and wished to confront that opponent alone. He must have much to consider.

I approached the ice sculpture, and touched it with the tips of my fingers.
It held no temperature. It was neither cold nor warm. What looked like ice, but couldn't be, was surely a seal. A fragment of the power that had sealed all the land in ice a year ago.

If by this result, Leigie-sama is saved in the slightest, then that's fine. I won't think anything of it.

The brief case in his hands disappeared. To where it originally should have been… likely a corner of Leigie-sama's room. Up to quite recently, that had been my role, but I had not the right to complain of his selection to use a Skill to transport it in an instant.

I should merely find joy in the grand task of transporting this statue.
I'll care for Leigie-sama, and at the same time, receive from him. In the distant past, that was the relation my first ancestor that came in service to Leigie devised.

"It's no good… all of it just seems… tiring."

His ghastly gallant expression sent a glance towards my feet.

Our eyes met. As he often never looked one in the eye when speaking, it was quite a rare occurrence.
An impact like an electric shock raced from my legs up my spine, and that alone caused my body to stiffen. It was an impulse similar to pleasure, and quite an honor for me. Gaining recognition from one who governs Sloth such as Leigie isn't something that happens too often.

His lips formed my name. My heart shook and heated up. I caution myself not to let it show on my complexion too much. I am but a loyal servant.

"Lorna?"

"… Yes…"

But the next words to come out of his mouth had completely exceeded my imagination.
Nonchalantly, truly listlessly, he gave out that declaration.

"I'll grant you some free time."

"… Eh…?"

I didn't know what he was trying to say.
After a few seconds, I finally comprehended, and the truth hit me like a pan to the face.
A vertigo greater than anything I had ever felt before. All before my eyes went pitch black.
The candles were properly lit, yet the entire world seemed heavy and dark.

I naturally put my hands to my ears, and shook my head. My heart stopped for a moment, before starting itself up with a beat that felt it would rupture.
Misheard … no, there's no way I would ever mishear Leigie-sama's words.
My lip trembled. I tried to take a deep breath to calm myself, but was pressed for air.
The words that came out after several seconds quite cut up, contrary to my will.

"Ha… have I… made some… sort of err.. hic.. or?"

My words mixed in with my tears were nothing suited of Leigie-sama's perfect servant.
Before the overwhelming wave of emotion, it felt like all the training I had done to now had been meaningless.

No… just crying would be… more decent.
Without noticing the reverberation of my soul core, that felt like it would shatter itself at any moment, Leigie-sama answered.

"No… wrong. My regrets have… faded. I have yet to see my future prospects. So I'll just sleep… and wait…"

"… What will you do… about your meals?"

"They're unnecessary. In the first place, eating is unnecessary to me."

"… Cleaning the room is…"

"I can sleep anywhere."

"… Y-your clothing is…"

"… Iyo."

Perhaps it became a pain, as he only returned one word in the end.
But his face didn't give off the impression he was speaking a joke. In the first place, Leigie-sama doesn't do anything as troubling as joke around.

The role I had been given in life was to follow Leigie-sama's mighty will. My predessor, and the all the predecessors before her had lived their lives just like that. If this truly is what Leigie-sama wishes for, if I truly will be an obstruction to him… I must swallow up my tears, and depart from my master's presence.
No, while we're at it… it would be best for me to die. Right. Death would be the better option. I know not any other way to live. I have nothing that I want to do.

I knew. I had realized it long ago. There's no way I couldn't have.
To Leigie-sama, my devotion… no, my ancestors devotion included, all of it was something liss than garbage. Leigie-sama was able to live his life alone.
The one relying on his grand power had been me.

I asked for confirmation once more.

"… So you… don't need me any longer?"

"Iyo."

Leigie-sama gave a truly curt response.

My thoughts turned at full throttle. Not needed… no, what should I…
…

For the first time ever, I tried arbitrarily interpreting his words.

Iyo…
I'm satisfied with your work… no, I'll leave it to you.

"… My liege… no, Leigie-sama… I want to serve you no matter what… um, well, I'll do any… thing… just as always… can you not keep me by your side?"

"Iyo."

Leigie-sama's short answer.

Iyo…
I am satisfied with your work… no, I'll leave it to you.

He's going to leave it to me…
Then I can do whatever I want…

"T-thank you, Leigie-sama… for your lenient judgement, I hold the greatest of gratitude."

As I timidly presented my flawed proposition, Leigie-sama stared at me with eyes as if to say, 'this one sure is a pain,' but he didn't say anything.

My field of vision was bluring. I deeply lowered my head.

By the time I raised it, Leigie-sama's figure had already disappeared. I'll bet her returned to his bedroom.

I looked towards the carpet that was a mess, and the cracked walls. It's unthinkable for me to leave such wreckage in the Throne Room. I'll have to fix it…
And after that I'll have to make Leigie-sama's, and Medea's meals… It may be best to start the preparations for Leigie-sama's right now.
Of course, it's not going to pose much of a problem right now, but so as not to abandon it, I should properly carry out my duty…

I started to put together the list of things I had to do, as I cast my eyes onto the ice sculpture of Serge Serenade.
It was a quiet expression, without rage or sadness, or fighting spirit. I have no idea what she had been thinking at that moment.

Even if I had my theories, the nature of Leigie-sama's regrets remained unknown to me. I can't really ask him, and even if I do, I doubt I'll get an answer.

But I'm sure…

"Leigie-sama, your regrets will… fade away someday…"

I was not a unit for war. Just a simple maid, that existed to take care of the matters around Leigie-sama.

But the state of affairs was all within my head.
My clan. The clan of shadows in service to Leigie-sama didn't just consist of me and Hiero. Back in ancient times, in the Demon World covered in a high casualty rate, with Leigie-sama's protection as our base, the gradually expanding clan had become the one with the greatest scale in the world. They were scattered all about it.

The information gathered from all over spoke tales of it.
Of the start of Heard Lauder's rebellion. Of how the state of the Demon World, that had been stagnant for so long, was finally on the move.
And power was naturally drawn towards greater power.
Right. Just like… the moths drawn to the flames of a torch.

Vanity Seidthroan's movements.
The movements of the Angels and Valkyries descending.
Shifts great enough that the Great Demon King's army couldn't turn a blind eye to it.

Of all else, the one that seemed to be the greatest pain was… the『Church』's movements.

I'm perhaps the only one to know of it. Only the one who adores you so.
What my power of Luxuria told me about you, your『Power』, my dear.

Governing over Sloth, the『Evil God』.

Even when put against to the ruling power of the Demon World, the Demon Lords, it must be something incomparably heavy.
It wasn't just that his power was strong. The meaning behind the God in his title.

The second greatest power in the Demon World.
The first was the『Great Demon King's Army』.
The second, the『Malign Deity Faction』.

But that power balance is being destroyed by a reduction in the Demon Lords allied to Kanon.
With their creed at the base, the discipline of that Church that suppressed its own desires for a greater cause was abnormal. It's not like they were strong, simply… abnormal.
For those ones that revere the Evil God, as unworthy as they may be, it's likely they will target his personage.
All I'm permitted to do is stay by Leigie-sama's side. But I'd like to think that's more than enough.

"Please have some rest, Leigie-sama. Just take it as it comes…"

The Lazy King. From near and far, those that knew of him closed their mouths, and those that didn't waited in fear.
His glory of the past was merely a scratch, a short interval on his eternity. And little by little, it all fades to gray. But his majesty is ceaselessly handed down.

I don't mean to hold any pride about it, but if it is to sate his boredom, then if he wished for it, I'd always be by his side.

I took the ice sculpture over my shoulder, and departed from the throne room.

Now then, in this room, on that throne, will the chance ever come for him to entrust his body to it again?

As if to extinguish my incoherent thoughts, the door let out a resounding creak, as it shut closed.